MAOIST COMMUNIST GROUP

THE ORGANIZATION OF A STRUGGLE COMMITTEE IN A HOUSING COMPLEX

The Organization of a Struggle Committee in a Housing Complex
Maoist Communist Group

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maoistcommunistgroup@riseup.net
maoistcommunistgroup.com

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INTRODUCTION

Following publication of the *Three Documents* in June 2015, the Maoist Communist Group determined the central task for the coming period: all units of the MCG were to forge direct mass links in protracted sequences of mass work with concrete material stakes against specific class enemies. Guided by this central task, the New York City unit of the MCG joined a struggle of building maintenance workers that unfolded in the broad context of a tenant struggle against a new landlord in a low-income housing complex.

Our intervention followed both a strategic political choice, linked to a concrete analysis of the concrete situation, and a permanent orientation.

—*a strategic political choice*: Our mass work must at all times be submitted to the project of party construction. Following Lenin, we can divide party construction into: (1) *party organization*: unification between collectives of communist militants, and (2) *party building* in the mass movement. Our strategic political choice is in favor of party building as the principal aspect of party construction in the conjuncture. We call upon the small-group communist left to take up building a proletarian center in the mass movement as the central task that defines the current stage of the revolutionary process.

That our choice in favor of party building is strategic and political means that it is a question of *line*. Line is *strategic* because it orients the whole in relation to the question of the Party: it is not a matter of tactics or local expediency. It is *political* because it engages the question of power and the state from the class perspective of the communist organization.

That our choice in favor of party building is a *choice* means that our engagement is historical and concrete, posed to us by the real relation of social forces in the conjuncture, and is not mainly a matter of universal principles.

Party organization between small groups only acquires its sense on the basis of the living experience of party building in the mass movement. In the current moment, marked by weak or non-existent political links between small groups and movements among the broad masses, communists must develop the question of the Party by leading struggles for power over concrete situations. The process of the Party depends on existing mass political movements. This has been an essential lesson we have drawn from concretely analyzing both our own experience and the political conjuncture in the US.

—*a permanent orientation*: Our political line must be a mass political line, that is, a political line developed and verified in relation to the broad masses.[1] That the class political line must be a mass line is a *universal principle* of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. This principle takes on its full scope in relation to an essential lesson of the GPCR: the revolution is everywhere and always the affair of the broad masses and must be carried out within their political activity. The mass line maintains the material link between the class organization and the masses at every stage of the revolutionary process by articulating the proletarian political *line* with popular questions of a *programmatic* character.

The Party and the program must be constructed simultaneously. The program systematizes popular ideas that emerge through ideological mass struggles in the real historical movement. Lenin writes, "every program shall be the precise formulation of the actual process."[2] To formulate the program in advance of the real movement, as many small groups do, is to substitute line for program, proletarian class thought for the revolutionary thought of the masses. It is the popular program that concretely affirms the political link, via the relation of leadership, between the class organization and the people.

It falls to the class organization to systematize the left road in the mass movement as it constructs the program. The proletarian class organization formulates the popular program on the basis of the progressive centralization of its elements by revolutionary mass organizations. Correct proletarian leadership

1 The mass line names both a *dialectical movement* between the class organization and the broad masses or mass organizations and a *particular step* in that movement. We can understand the movement as follows: (1) existence of dispersed and divided vanguard mass ideas that emerge in rebellions (2) centralization and scientific systematization of these vanguard mass ideas by the class party practicing Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (social investigation, concrete class analysis) (3) link between the concrete analysis and transformation of the objective situation through the class form of the directive (moment of the *mass political line proper*) (4) application of the directive by the class organization leading the broad masses (5) production of new dispersed and divided mass ideas as a result of implementing the directive (6) social investigation and summation (carried out alongside the masses) of the results of its implementation (7) rectification of the political line = repetition of 1-6 in light of the summation.

2 Lenin, *What The "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 1 (Progress Publishers, 1972), 297.

is what guarantees that the *mass* program at the same time has a *proletarian* character, which is to say: the victorious satisfaction of each partial element, tied to the real movement of this or that social group – women, oppressed nationalities, various social classes – must reinforce and develop the *whole* of the revolutionary camp in the struggle against the class enemy. The program *generalizes immediate demands* in light of the strategic interests of the whole.[3] It must serve the political unity of the people, and not simply reflect the objective divisions, imposed by the bourgeoisie, from which various mass struggles proceed.

The Maoist conception of the Party thus divides: "vanguard of the most revolutionary class" (Lenin), it is at the same time the leading core of the whole people.[4] The Party, built in the mass movement and organized between collectives of militants, must at once bear a proletarian ideological and political line and formulate a popular-revolutionary program around which unity is organized. Internal knowledge grounded in political links with movements among the worker and popular masses constitutes a necessary condition for all correct formulation of line and program, as well as the concrete ways they enrich and develop each other.

This is a thoroughly historical conception of party construction, concretely articulated with the mass movement. To grasp the party-building political line as a *mass* line means that the Party of a new type will not be built by transmitting a pre-existing model of organization to the mass movement, but rather can only be realized as a process in which communists gather, centralize and systematize the revolutionary aspirations of the working class and masses and return them in the class form of directives that aim to transform reality. One consequence: it is impossible to know, prior to its construction, the precise form that the Party of a new type will assume.

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3 To *generalize* a demand is not to take an immediate position on that demand. Rather, it is to formulate a principle, on the basis of the demand, that allows ideological struggle to be waged around positions to be taken up in concrete class situations. For example, the right of nations to self-determination (1) is the programmatic generalization of the demand, raised in the mass movement, for an independent national state, and (2) makes possible debates over demands of that type in diverse political conjunctures. This is why Ibrahim Kaypakkaya insists that it is only the *right* of nations to self-determination that should be included as an element in the program, and not how that right should be exercised: "… a communist movement never includes the question of whether or not a national state should be established in its program. It never makes an advance judgment regarding the founding of a separate national state. A communist movement, as we have pointed out above, gives a guarantee of a 'nation's right to self-determination' and puts this in its program. On the question of whether or not to secede, it makes a decision according to concrete conditions." I. Kaypakkaya, *The National Question in Turkey*, in *Selected Works* (Nisan Publishing, 2014), 256.

4 Lenin, *What is To Be Done?*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (Progress Publishers, 1964), 520.

The party-building mass line is elaborated through a complex dialectic between three terms that we must clearly and strategically distinguish at all times: the proletarian class organization, mass organizations and the broad masses. The summation that follows deals with a series of lessons we drew from our handling of this dialectic.

The principal lesson: During the sequence under consideration, we did not clearly divide the question of unity from that of organization, and we conceived of both as the reflex of the mass mobilization that accompanied the concrete struggle. This was an entirely erroneous conception of mass work.

1. The Question of Unity: Class Organization/Broad Masses

In order for the question of unity to be taken up by the broad masses, proletarian ideology must be placed in command. This cannot be achieved through a one-sided reliance on propaganda, agitation or education. Rather, the dialectic between unification (organizing the masses at the level of the whole) and the triumph of proletarian ideology (the presence of the tasks of the whole as a permanent and scientific ideology) forms a spiraling process whose principal aspect is unification. In order to put proletarian ideology in command, the class organization must carry out a basic task of leadership in relation to the broad masses: resolving contradictions among the people in order to deploy collectivism over objectives of power.

We must never lose sight of the fact that proletarian ideology is a systematization and generalization of real class relations from the class perspective of the proletariat.

To place proletarian ideology in command is to inscribe diverse popular movements in the project of proletarian dictatorship. It is to proceed from ideas raised in the mass movement to the formulation and realization of the revolutionary program that cements the unity of the people, so that the people become a genuine political force. Without proper leadership by the class organization – the headquarters of struggle of *all* layers of the people – each layer will fail to see its interests represented in the struggles of the other layers and none will understand what is to be gained by participating in collective struggle.

The struggle against the class enemy thus proceeds dialectically from communist initiative regarding the unity of the people – between workers and tenants, workers and semi-proletarians, workers of different nationalities, men and women, etc. – and it is on this material foundation that proletarian ideology can be placed in command and the project of the whole consciously and col-

lectively developed as the revolutionary and popular program is constructed.[5]

On the other hand, if we make unity a simple product of the practical struggle, determined principally by the maneuvers of the class enemy, then while we may be able to cement a unity, it will be at best a *temporary* and *localist* unity, entirely submitted to tactical requirements. Without a concrete perspective of the whole, the camp of the people cannot be constructed, and the masses will be divided between dispersed unities without a strategic foundation, constituted only in relation to local class situations. This is the narrow path of 'left'-economism, which takes up dispersed programmatic questions posed by the mass movement without a fixed class perspective on those questions – that is, without articulating them with the project and political line of the proletariat.

However, the question of unity is something other than the question of the political identity of the organization.

2. The Question of Organization: Class Organization/Mass Organization

Even if we had victoriously handled the contradictions among the people – if we had united the people so that they could bring a *collective* combat against *all* class practices of the enemy – this would not itself have been sufficient to pose the question of the Party, because the latter can only proceed from practicing the mass line on the question of organization. Comrades must at each moment ask: how do forms of mass organization articulate the particular struggle with consciousness of the whole?

Taking up this question requires communists to concretely analyze the situation and the ideas expressed in it on the basis of ideological struggle over the political identity of the mass organization, carried out with its advanced members. Only on this condition can the proletarian class organization practicing Marxism-Leninism-Maoism effectively structure the mass movement in the line of party construction.

We were unable to correctly handle the dialectic between the class organization, the broad masses and mass organizations around either the question of unity or that of organization. For this reason, our strategic political choice in

5 The project of the whole can be summed up as follows: *the revolution is made by the whole people in order to serve the whole people*. We can understand the project of the whole in terms of Marx's characterization of it in the *Manifesto*: "In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole." Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 6 (Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), 497.

favor of party building was liquidated in favor of tactical opportunism, and the permanent orientation of the mass line was scattered to the blind and intermittent winds of the mass movement.

I. THE INITIAL SITUATION

In January, a new landlord purchased a large, private sub-normal housing complex of 300 units located adjacent to a transportation hub at the edge of expanding privileged and normal housing markets. The overwhelming majority of tenants, nearly all of them Black, receive rent subsidies.

The strategy of the landlord is to opt for a policy of disinvestment. The logic is simple and brutal: as the buildings are slowly destroyed, the landlord continues to collect rent – a rent that will continue to rise in real terms. Once the tenants have all left or been evicted, the complex will be demolished and the land sold to a developer, who will then build housing for the normal or privileged housing markets.

On the worker front, the landlord immediately implemented massive wage cuts, eliminated benefits, distributed phony written warnings reprimanding the workers (in order to establish cause for future firings and suspensions), and engaged in racist supervisory harassment, escalating to threats of physical violence. In court, the landlord pled to disjoin a city statute that requires new landlords to retain as many existing workers as there are positions during an evaluation period from the requirements of federal law that mandate recognition of the existing trade union.

One worker quit. In May, the shop steward was fired. Management issued rules explicitly aimed at isolating the remaining workers from tenant and neighborhood support: no talking about management, no socializing with residents or visitors and no conversations with non-residents. One month later, the landlord fired the remaining six workers, including the building super, who now faced eviction as well. The property manager later claimed that the workers all walked off the job. A week later, the union organized a picket, covered in the local news.

The conditions in the building, already inadequate, deteriorated sharply: tenants went months without hot water, garbage piled up in stairwells, rats and other vermin proliferated, all but one of the elevators broke, apartments flooded.

In order to understand the landlord's policy of disinvestment, we must grasp the dynamics of price formation in the sub-normal housing market.

Disinvestment and Rising Prices[6]

The market price of housing is determined by current conditions of production for the market, which increasingly diverges over time from its initial conditions of production, and thus from its initial price. A house built in 1900 sells for far more today than its original price. The difference between the current price of the good above its historical price – or the current rental above the rental price leaving production – is the *real estate rent*, formed in the circulation process. Real estate rent is the determination of stock prices by current prices. It depends on a long-run increase in the market price of housing. This can be produced in one of two different ways:

(1) The building is maintained in the normal housing market thanks to *regular investments* that maintain (or even improve) the building, which allow prices to be fixed at the regulating price of new housing – the magnitude around which market prices oscillate.

The regulating price of new housing is in part determined by a sectoral surplus profit (which can be fixed as an absolute rent) whose practical source is the high organic composition of capital in the construction industry, marked by relatively-backwards technical relations of production and stagnant productive forces.[7] This factor leads to a persistent rise in relative prices in the normal housing market.

(2) The housing is abandoned to progressive degradation, via a *policy of disinvestment*. The price falls relative to new prices, and the housing enters the sub-normal housing market. However, while disinvestment leads to an immediate fall in prices as housing changes markets, the internal price dynamics of the sub-normal

6 The argument in this section closely follows that of C. Topalov, *Le profit, la rente et la ville. Éléments de théorie* (Economica, 1984). See also Marx, "Transformation of Surplus Profit into Ground Rent," in *Capital, Volume III*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 37 (Lawrence & Wishart), 608-800, and Lenin, *The Agrarian Question and 'Critics of Marx*, in *Collected Works* (Progress Publishers, 1961), 103-222.

7 The regulating price of new housing is determined as the sum of three factors:

—the social price of production of normal housing (= capital consumed plus average profit on the invested capital);
—the social price of production of constructible land, formed at the site in the zone that is most costly to develop. Sites with lower localized individual prices of production then yield surplus profits that can be fixed as differential rents;
—a sectoral surplus profit in the construction industry determined by the high ratio of "living" capital, invested in labor power – productive of value and surplus value – to "dead" capital, invested in means of production (machines, raw materials, tools). This sectoral surplus profit can be fixed as an absolute rent, which blocks determination of the regulating price by the social price of production.

See Topalov, *Le profit*, 130.

housing market are characterized by long-run price *increases*.

There is no regulating price in the sub-normal housing market, because below-average profitability there means that supply cannot be fed by new capitalist production, but rather mainly grows through the deterioration of existing housing stock. Where new sub-normal housing *is* fed by capitalist production, such production is subsidized by the state (in New York City, by NYCHA). A systematic gap is thus formed between the market price of housing and the current conditions of production or maintenance, so that prices are uniquely determined in the sphere of circulation. The result of this structural weakness of supply is a *monopoly price of shortage* that leads to long-run real increases in housing prices.[8]

This policy of disinvestment occurs in two distinct urban zones:

—popular neighborhoods that are remote from profitability via urban transformation;
—popular neighborhoods either adjacent or internal to higher housing markets.

The low-income complex in which we intervened is located in the second of these zones. The new landlord guaranteed the reproduction of invested capital through the possibilities opened up by the future change in land usage. At the moment of demolition, the increase in ground rent will ensure the profitability of the operation. The price that the landlord paid for the complex, around $40 million, was itself linked to this future price of the 'liberated' land. The landlord's actions are part of an uncompromising politics of expelling the neighborhood's poorest residents, nearly all of them Black, by the bourgeoisie.

From this it follows that:

—the struggle was from the beginning a *life and death struggle*: the goal of the capitalist was either to demolish the housing complex or to sell it to another capitalist who would demolish it;
—struggles around fired workers and 'quality of life' in this class situation were related to the question of survival, since the success of the initial investment – and thus the disappearance of the tenants – depended on a policy of structural neglect that severely degraded living conditions in the complex.[9]

8 What is true of housing prices is also true of rentals. The regulating rental is the rental-price of housing leaving production, determined as simple reproduction of invested capital plus the average rate of profit on that capital. Implementation of a policy of disinvestment ensures that the rental falls relative to new rentals and the housing enters the sub-normal housing market, where the structural shortage of new housing leads to long-run real price increases.

9 We later produced a short booklet on the housing question today intended for a mass audience. See Appendix B.

Two Lines

If the principal contradiction opposed the workers to the landlord-management, the policy of disinvestment governing the situation meant that this contradiction was closely linked to the struggle between the landlord-management and the tenants.

The choices facing the tenants and the workers represented two lines in the concrete class situation, the left road and the right road:

—*Tenants*: Should the tenants take the right road, and make the landlord pay as much as possible for their disappearance – for example, by demanding payouts? Or should they instead take the left road, and struggle against displacement – that is, for their strategic defense, their survival – which would require undermining the investment of the landlord?
—*Workers*: Should the workers take the right road, and allow the union to negotiate the terms of the hiring, and thus the departure, of some among them? Or should they follow the left road of the immediate worker vanguard and struggle to get all their jobs back?

While it was clear to us from the outset that the left road in the worker and tenant struggles would have to pass through unity between workers and tenants, the relationship between resolving contradictions among the people and putting proletarian ideology in command eluded us. At the time, we conceived of the need for unity in narrowly practical terms: with only six workers struggling against the landlord, any consequential victory would require tenant support.

In fact, the need for unity provides proletarian leadership with its political content. Putting proletarian ideology in command means uniting the broad worker and tenant masses around the positions of the left, so that the people can collectively organize a united combat against the bourgeoisie.

Our failure to do this would determine the course that the struggle would take over the months to come.

II. THE SEQUENCE OF THE STRUGGLE UP TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE STRUGGLE COMMITTEE

To Investigate a Problem Is to Solve It (Mao)

One month prior to the initiation of the picket, unaware of the developing workers' situation, we began distributing leaflets at entrances to the housing complex that put forward our tactical slogan: "Struggle Committees Everywhere!" The purpose of the distribution was to initiate conversations with workers and tenants. The vast majority expressed opposition to the new landlord.

At one point during our leafleting, a management supervisor, with a security guard at her side, confronted us: "There are no problems in the building."

There were several fires in the building during those weeks, leaving burnt-out hallways that would not be repaired for many months. These fires sent several tenants to the hospital, some of who would later join the struggle committee or the broader camp of tenants that supported the struggle committee.

This period of leafleting represented only a *prelude* to social investigation. *For Maoists, social investigation should not be understood as the initial moment in a linear process, but instead must be grasped as a constituent term in a dialectic with organization*. Social investigation does not precede the process of organization, but integrally participates in it.

We must therefore not confine social investigation to the beginning or end of a given sequence of mass work. Rather, the investigation-organization dialectic unfolds *throughout* each sequence. One of the tasks of communists is to seize those key points in a given sequence in which an organizational or political advance demands a militant and systematic social investigation, beyond the initial moment of the sequence and its conclusion.

The Workers' Picket Begins

In early June, six workers began a daily picket sponsored by the union. This marked the beginning of the sequence of the worker struggle.

A worker we met while leafleting informed us of the picket. We arrived on the first day of the picket shortly before 7:00 am. We observed a baseball bat and a few metal pipes on the ground. The union immediately put a stop to this practice of

self-defense at the picket, even though the possibility of a violent attack by agents of the landlord would become a reality soon enough.

We learned that two of the workers and their families were also long-time tenants, while the majority lived elsewhere, although mostly in the immediate neighborhood. The trade union official on site approached us, discussing an eventual negotiated settlement as inevitable: "you know how these things go…."

To the workers, we proposed the idea of producing and distributing a leaflet to explain their situation to the tenants and the neighborhood. Cooperating with the workers and tenants in the creation of the leaflet became our first practical task.

After a few rounds of drafting and editing with the workers and several tenants, we began distributing the leaflet with tenants and other contacts, both inside the housing complex and on the street. One worker led a comrade through the complex in order to place leaflets under the doors of tenants. The trade union prohibited the workers from handing out the leaflet they had helped to write. When the workers wanted a passerby to get a leaflet, they had to instruct either a militant or a tenant to give it to them.

On the Trade Union and Trade Unionism Today

Thus, literally from day one, the trade union leadership exhibited its opposition to the political autonomy of the worker masses.

The practices of the trade union in the housing complex included:

—*Opposition to the Building of Links*: Although, due to the small size of the shop, the trade union was an important means for the workers to relate to other workers, union officials actively discouraged efforts by the fired workers to build concrete links of solidarity with other workers, inside or outside of their union. In addition, they prevented the workers from linking to struggles on other fronts, including the tenant struggle. The union confined the workers to the narrow horizon of their shop and trade union, isolating them there where they worked and cutting them off from the rest of the people, which is precisely where the class enemy wants to maintain them.

—*Opposition to Mass Democracy*: The trade union leadership insisted on negotiating with management and prevented the workers from exercising their own intellectual and organizational capacities. The picket they set up in front of the building was a display – an advertisement for the union, with workers as a mere prop. Everything was to be negotiated behind closed doors between the management and the union. All attempts at proletarian initiative would be met with threats by

the union leadership.

—*Opposition to Proletarian Counter-Violence*: Beginning with the forbidding of instruments of self-defense, the trade union leadership refused every effort by the workers to exercise collective force as a means of modifying the relation of power between themselves and the class enemy. Workers were particularly upset that they had no means of blocking scabs from the worksite. As one worker put it: "What's the point of a picket if you can't shut down the jobsite?"

—*Reinforcement of Powerlessness and Discouragement*: The union leadership repeatedly announced, to anyone who would listen, that the worker struggle was bound to fail. The will to capitulate, to discourage the collective aspirations of the workers, was present from the start.

What we can say about the trade union *as an institution* is that it is an objective mechanism, completely external to politics, which prevents the wage from persistently falling below the value of labor power.

In fact, the trade union is not simply external to politics, but actively prevents the constitution of a proletarian politics, separating the worker masses from the question of power and the state, blocking the construction of a mass program that aims to resolve the fundamental contradictions that traverse society. Trade unions objectivize and socialize class contradictions by refusing the proletarian class perspective – completely antagonistic to the bourgeoisie – that enables the working class to transform itself into a political subject.

However, we must in no case treat trade unions as if they exist apart from the dynamics of the mass movement – as if their reactionary character, *in general* principal, is principal *in every historical period*.

Any reactionary mass organization is defined by the contradiction between its reactionary aspect and the fact that it gathers the broad masses of the center. Communists must concretely analyze this contradiction in terms of the dynamics of the struggle in the conjuncture. The trade union question cannot simply be referred to principles.

In 1920, Lenin noted that the dynamics of the mass movement in the imperialist countries continuously reinforced the trade union as a site of mass worker organization.[10] This growth of mass participation at that time indicated that the mass aspect was then principal in relation to the reactionary aspect. It was the dominance of the mass aspect that led Lenin to advocate trade-union entryism.

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10 See Lenin, *"Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 31 (Progress Publishers, 1964), 46-55. See also A. Badiou, *Syndicalisme et révisionisme moderne*, in *Théorie et politique*, No. 5, July 1975, 62-64.

Our experience with the trade union in this struggle and others would confirm for us the importance of worker anti-trade unionism. At this point in the imperialist stage, the reactionary aspect is dominant: the trade union is a powerful instrument through which the imperialist bourgeoisie prevents unification of the broad worker masses by sowing individualism and private interest in place of collectivism and the general interest. The trade union is mainly a social partner of the bourgeoisie and only secondarily a type of worker mass organization. Today, any genuine popular and revolutionary politics must work for the political liquidation of trade-union entryism.

Indeed, the dynamics of the mass movement have led to the general atrophying of the trade union as a form of worker organization, to the point that in the US as a whole, only a small (and decreasing) minority of workers are unionized. The movement of mass rebellions that communists must organize in the line of proletarian dictatorship is in large part external to the trade unions.

The corrective to reactionary trade unions today must include building popular power outside the trade unions, in revolutionary mass organizations of a new type, submitted to the project of party construction. Communists must lead in organizing this alternative for the worker masses.

Initial Clash with Management

A series of management personnel tried to stop the workers from hanging a union placard on a fence post at the edge of the property.

The area supervisor approached the picket with her bodyguard. When she began verbally harassing the shop steward, a comrade shouted back, encouraging everyone on the picket to do the same. The shop steward yelled, inches from the face of the supervisor: "If I was your husband, I'd *hang* myself!" The scab building super then approached the workers armed with a wrench in his hand, eventually backing down after noticing our presence. A security officer ripped down the placard, which the workers immediately rehung from the post, leading to the arrival of the cops, who ordered the workers not to post the placard on the landlord's property.

This sequence allowed us to practice our first verbal summations with the workers, which aimed to synthesize their experience – minor in quantitative terms but already rich in lessons – at the hands of the cops and the management. The objective existence of the class enemy is something other than its subjective construction by the masses. The enemy does not exist *politically* as a unified social force prior to the summation of a protracted historical experience together with Maoist militants.

However, this protracted historical memory is weak in the US conjuncture. The lack of experience of sharp struggle in recent decades in the workers' movement translates into a spontaneous ambivalence regarding the link between the management, the trade union and the police. It would take many weeks of struggle before the workers began to grasp – tentatively and temporarily – that the union, the police, the politicians, lawyers, the media and the tenants' association together formed part of a unified camp of reaction.

The First Tenants' Association Meeting

The tenants' association, like the trade union, can be characterized as a reactionary mass organization. Its leadership made no effort to attend the workers' picket throughout the struggle. One of its leaders told the workers that it wanted "to work *with* management, not against them." It held closed-door meetings with management and worked openly with the local police precinct – for example, co-sponsoring a movie screening with them for kids in the building. It is closely connected with local Democratic Party leaders.

The tenants' association organized its membership principally by sharpening and reinforcing the contradictions among the tenants and between the tenants and the workers. Most of the active members of the tenants' association congregated at the back of the building complex, far from the picket line, throughout the worker struggle. In contrast, we were on the picket line daily for the duration of the sequence.

The first tenants' association meeting that we attended represented the height of its power to organize the tenants during the sequence. There were approximately 150 tenants present, including the two worker-tenants. Also present was a representative of a local non-profit, founded by a Black church in the neighborhood. Some of its board members are also officers of major banks.

The facilitator, an officer of the tenants' association, opened the meeting with a sharp attack on our involvement in the struggle, lamenting the presence of "outsiders." Despite the fact that we had spoken with her multiple times in the recent past, she said, "I do not know who they are." When a member of the Struggle Committees Initiative asked to speak – someone who spent most of his life in the neighborhood, in no meaningful way an "outsider" – her reply was immediate and unequivocal: "Not at my meeting."[11] This open suppression of mass democracy would prove to be a powerful source of support for us by the broad tenant masses over the months to come.

11 The Struggle Committees Initiative is a broad organization of both mass contacts and Maoists that supports the construction of struggle committees on various fronts – worker, housing, neighborhood, youth – under the slogan "Struggle Committees Everywhere!"

The facilitator spoke for most of the meeting, handing over the floor for brief presentations: one by a union official relating the situation of the fired workers and another by a staff member from the non-profit. She then took questions regarding rent receipts and other individual problems. She announced that the landlord and management company were invited to the next meeting and that she was unsure of their intentions. Two persistent themes: (1) the tenants were to blame for their own difficulties, and (2) their complaints were individual problems that as such demanded individual solutions.

As she spoke, a union petition for the workers was passed around the crowd. On the one hand, the petition was an attempt to rally the broad tenant masses to reactionary union leadership – ultimately, to reinforce divisions among the people. At the same time, the tenants who signed it correctly aspired to a united and organized combat of the whole against the landlord and management.

The facilitator discouraged tenants from signing the petition, telling them that the worker struggle had "nothing to do with the tenants." The tenants' association leadership aimed to separate the worker struggle from the tenant struggle. Reformism always and everywhere attacks the unity of the people with the weapon of demand economism.

To break the correct aspiration of the masses for unity and organization: this is the very essence of bourgeois ideology. If the fact of isolation and powerlessness is a material product of class society, the transformation of this objective fact into a subjective obstacle preventing the consolidation of the masses as a social force under proletarian leadership is the aim of bourgeois ideology . When confronted with the collective popular will to master a situation in the class struggle, the only recourse of the bourgeoisie is to divide the masses.

Although the reactionary character of the tenants' association leadership was apparent, at that time the contradiction between reactionary leadership and mass participation in the tenants' association defined a living process: the broad participation of the tenant masses was growing. This reinforcement of the mass character of the tenants' association demanded our presence at its meetings.

This dynamic would reverse itself over the course of the struggle, so that by the end of the sequence, the tenants' association would become the headquarters of just a small handful of reactionaries.

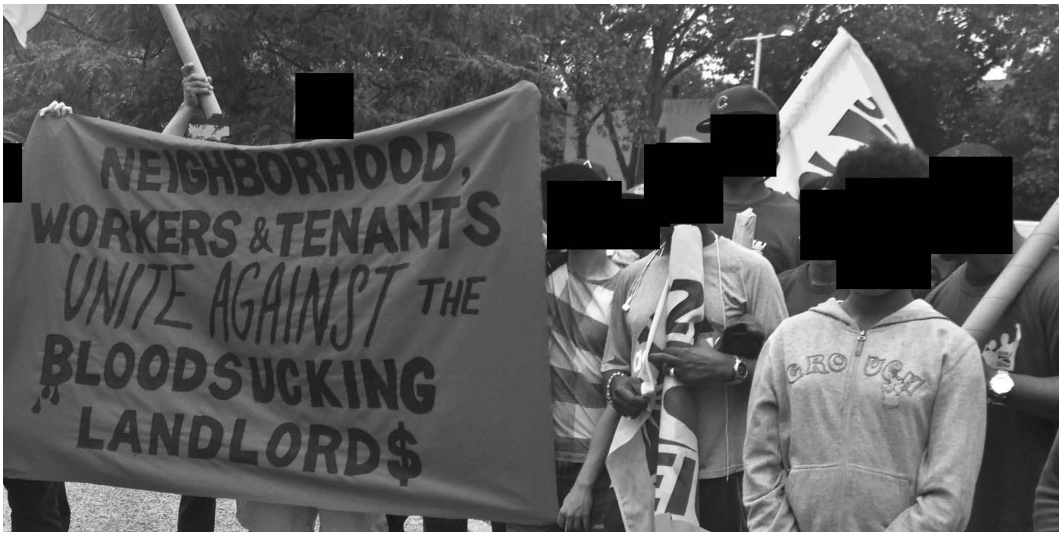
After the end of the meeting, we spoke with approximately a dozen tenants, most of whom expressed disgust at the leadership of the tenants' association for censoring us when it became clear to them that we came to support the tenant struggle. Some of them would later become the first members of the struggle committee. As we left, another officer of the tenants' association told us: "There is a formal process if you want to hand out flyers. You have fill out some paperwork."

This is a typical example of the attitude of that section of the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy that functions as a mediating link between the broad masses and the bourgeois state: *The people belong to us. Your work must go through the proper channels – through us, or through state institutions. Under no circumstances can you organize – or even speak with – the people directly!*

The aim of this mediating link is to arrange bourgeois state responses to the questions thrown up by mass movements, to organize the masses along a road of narrow demands compatible with the imperialist state, to restrict the struggle to a purely social framework and to block the proletarian conception of the world, founded on a firm consciousness of the antagonism with the entire social and political order.

The First Trade Union Rally

Several weeks later, approximately 125 workers attended a rally in front of the building, nearly all members of the trade union local from other sites. Very few tenants from the building attended. Trade union officials led the workers in chanting the union's name as they walked a circling picket. Comrades and tenants held a large banner bearing a slogan, proposed by an advanced neighborhood contact, that put forward the need to combine the worker and tenant struggles with each other and with other struggles in the neighborhood: "*NEIGHBORHOOD, WORKERS & TENANTS UNITE AGAINST THE BLOODSUCKING LANDLORD$*."



At the conclusion of the rally, a large number of workers took photos with the banner, together with the small group of tenants that came out to support the worker struggle.

Why didn't more tenants come out in support of the worker struggle? This question – the concrete form in which the question of the unity of the people was initially posed – demanded a militant social investigation.

The First Collective Door-to-Door Work

In order to carry out this social investigation, an advanced mass contact and a tenant planned and participated in door-to-door distribution of leaflets together with militants. Immediate barrier: the building security. They trailed us throughout the building and partially succeeded in preventing us from engaging in discussions with the tenants. Our door-to-door work remained scattered and incomplete.

What we learned: a number of tenants thought the workers deserved to be fired for allegedly doing a poor job. Another camp actively supported the workers, divided into those that actively supported the workers and a broader group of semi-active supporters.

An initial summation of this door-to-door work, carried out together with tenants and workers on the picket line, was systematized in a slogan that upheld the left road among the workers and tenants: "Tenants and Workers United! We Won't Go!"

However, our door-to-door work was episodic, casual, and often displaced by intensive leafleting – typically at the same time of day, in the same places, which allowed us to forge strong ties with certain recurring tenants, but at the same time blocked a complete grasp of the social class composition of the housing complex. In the absence of organized and systematic door-to-door work and mass meetings on a large scale, leafleting cannot serve as a means of carrying out social investigation.

In general, if the proletarian class organization does not engage in a material practice of centralizing the dispersed aspirations of the broad masses in a direct, permanent and systematic fashion – if we allow leafleting to take the place of door-to-door work, or (as would become the case further along in the struggle) if we allow relations with mass organizations to be substituted for relations with the broad masses – then we end up with directives that systematize, and thus are able to transform, precisely nothing: no lessons can be drawn and no demands can be generalized.

Indirect, discontinuous and scattered relations between the class organization and the broad masses results in both subjectivism, since we are left with no objective basis for correctly defining political line, and localism, since the perspective

of the whole is lost. The correlative symptoms are, respectively, *dogmatism* – taking principles divorced from the concrete situation for a complete definition of political line – and *empiricism*: liquidating the fixed proletarian class perspective in the mobile and spontaneous forms of consciousness that emerge from the concrete struggle.

In our mass work that followed our intervention in the housing complex, we rectified this practice. For example, in our current door-to-door work, we systematically and comprehensively work to identify the needs of tenants along with their social class belonging and orientation towards the bourgeois class state.

Our knowledge of the class composition of the housing complex was thus weak. This in turn would make it impossible to characterize the left, right and center of the masses in terms of social class with any precision.

However, we were provisionally able to draw the following picture of the building:

Semi-Proletarians: The semi-proletariat – consisting of economic agents who supplement part-time or occasional low-wage employment with petty commerce (selling water, clothing, scrap metal, etc.) – formed by far the largest section of tenants that we organized in the complex. The semi-proletariat in the building is ideologically characterized by proletarian aspirations to unity countered by an individualism that reflects a fundamental attachment to petty property, along with embryonic forms of Black national consciousness and persistent idealism regarding the causes of its oppression and exploitation. This idealism often takes the systematic form of anti-Semitic conspiracism, which effectively serves to harmonize the antagonistic masses/state contradiction by displacing its antagonistic character onto the figure of the Jew.

Although broadly receptive to the project of proletarian revolution, our semi-proletarian contacts often wavered when faced with the two-line struggle in the mass movement. The vacillation of semi-proletarians must be referred to their internal contradictory character: they are at once workers and petty proprietors. Mao writes:

"As workers, small producers have many good qualities. They are industrious, thrifty, not afraid of hardships, cautious, and realistic. But as small owners, they are individualistic and what is more important, limited by their working conditions and methods and their use of outdated means of production, they are scattered, narrow-minded, and ill-informed. They are often blind to the strength of the collective; they see only that of the individual."[12]

12 Mao, *The Center's Instruction On Learning From Each Other And Overcoming Complacency And Conceit*, December 13, 1963, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_09.htm>

The persistent individualism of the semi-proletariat presents a formidable obstacle to putting proletarian ideology in command.

Petty Bourgeoisie/Labor Aristocracy: The petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy are a small minority in the housing complex, but they are the most highly organized section of tenants, concentrated in the tenants' association. They blame conditions in the building on both the alleged 'laziness' of the fired workers and the destructive behavior of the tenants. They are effectively agents of the landlord and management among the tenant masses.

Lumpenproletarians: The lumpenproletarians in the complex are predatory and destructive. They serve as a prop for the exercise of bourgeois power in the housing complex. Support for the police among the intermediate and backward sections of the tenants was reinforced by fear of lumpen predations, as was support for the landlord and management among the most backwards section of tenants. The tenants we organized rejected our efforts to distribute leaflets to lumpen elements in the complex.

Working class: Apart from the fired maintenance workers, we encountered relatively few workers. Whether this reflected our fragmentary approach to social investigation or the objective class composition of the housing complex, it is impossible to say. The workers in the building that we did meet were broader in their outlook than other sections of the tenant masses, more materialist in their grasp of the causes of their exploitation and oppression, and more organized in their approach to the struggle.

Although worker leadership is a universal principle of Marxism that cannot by bypassed, it would be a mistake to conclude that attempting to implement the party-building line on a front dominated by non-workers was an error. Indeed, protracted mass work on non-worker fronts has a particular importance in the process of party construction – why?

Party Construction on Non-Proletarian Fronts

Every concrete situation in which we intervene in part serves as a site in which our capacity to lead is verified – or not. In a concrete class situation on a non-worker front, what is tested is precisely the capacity of the proletariat to lead a class other than itself. This point must be emphasized in a small-group communist environment that is saturated with workerism in the ideologist form of petty-bourgeois identitarianism – 'ideologist' because this form of workerism does not involve any

consequential organization of workers.[13]

Workerism turns on a reflex between social and political class: it assumes that the simple existence of the proletariat as a social class leads automatically to its constitution as a political class. Like all ultra-left non-politics – from putschist conceptions of social revolution to the refusal of the dictatorship of the proletariat – what is proposed here is a type of miracle of the 'x will automatically lead to y'-type: if we burn the flag, the masses will be mobilized straightaway; the success of the social revolution will lead to communism without an intervening period of proletarian dictatorship.[14]

Against workerism, Maoists grasp the revolutionary process as the structuring of the mass movement of rebellions into a systematic politics led by the working class constructed as a political class. The essential relation here is the *relation of leadership*, realized through the Party. The Party is the organized means through which the working class becomes a leading class, a political class. It is the organization through which the political and social interests of the *whole people* come to displace the immediate demands of the working class as a social class. *The working class is* ***only*** *constructed as a political class when its organization has become the leading core of the whole people.*

While the Party has a proletarian class character, communism is an affair of the masses. The path to communism must enable the continuous expansion of popular power until "there is no longer a systematic struggle against a determined part of the population" – and thus "no need for a special machine – a special apparatus of repression" (Lenin).[15] The popular movement is reinforced at every stage of the revolutionary process until the dialectic between the masses and the state is irreversibly resolved in favor of the masses – with communism. At the height of the GPCR, Mao wrote: "Marx said: the proletariat must emancipate not only itself but all mankind. If it cannot emancipate all mankind, then the proletariat itself will not be able to achieve final emancipation."[16] The dictatorship of the proletariat ar-

13 'Ideologism,' for Maoists, names a practice of thinking entirely divorced from material conditions, what Lenin called "revolutionary phraseology."

14 'Putschism' refers to violence grasped unilaterally in terms of military force, with no stakes beyond itself. Against putschism, proletarian violence always cements or defends popular power over a concrete situation. (Of course, what we encounter in the small-group left today is only an *ideologist* version of putschism, as is the case with workerism: putschists who refrain from any acts of violence, workerists who organize no workers….) Proletarian violence is not principally defined by the use of force, but by the *relation* of forces it extends or transforms. Its consequential exercise will require the formation of a separate armed mass organization, embryo of the people's army, under the leadership of the class organization, embryo of the Party.

15 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 25 (Progress Publishers, 1974), 469.

16 Mao, *A Letter to the Red Guards of Tsinghua University Middle School*, August 1, 1966 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_60.htm>

ticulates *popular power* – not "workers' power," as Trotskyists would have it – with *proletarian leadership*.

It is for this reason that it cannot be said to be an error to carry out mass work among non-worker layers of the masses. The semi-proletariat and petty bourgeoisie must be integral participants in the building of a party of a new type. Indeed, revolutionary work on fronts dominated by non-workers precisely tests our capacity to become the leading core of the whole people.

On such fronts, the leading capacity of the class organization turns solely on the formulation of the program and tactics of the masses there. A precise formulation of the actual process requires mass links. We can only begin to specify the concept of the people and construct a revolutionary popular program by engaging in protracted sequences of mass work in which we produce class analyses and draw out general political conclusions. Nothing can be known in advance.

Revolutionary mass organizations emerge as a stage in this process: we link to the masses, we discover their social needs, we struggle over concrete issues and an immediate vanguard is born among the masses that can organize the broad intermediate layers. Mass organizations of this type include, at a low political level, struggle committees, and at the highest political level, soviets and factory councils.[17] Does proletarianizing such mass organizations demand that we restrict our mass work to factories and other workplace fronts?

Here, too, we must avoid the narrow and miserable conception of politics proposed by workerist ideology. The process of proletarianizing the mass organization depends far more on effective leadership by the class organization – above all, the ability to put proletarian ideology in command – than it does on the social class makeup of the mass organization. Whether or not it is composed of workers or semi-proletarians is external to the concept of a revolutionary mass organization, just as social class composition is external to the concept of the proletarian class organization. "We must have a committee of professional revolutionaries, and it is immaterial whether a student or a worker is capable of becoming a professional revolutionary." (Lenin).[18]

17 *Political level* here is determined by the proximity between (1) the practice of the antagonistic contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and (2) the question of state power. In a struggle committee, the social practice of unity and organization countering the bourgeoisie on a given front is distant from the question of state power. In the soviets of 1905 and 1917, the class struggle had state power as its immediate stakes. In such mass organizations, the antagonistic contradiction and the question of state power nearly coincide. We will develop this point further along in the summation.

18 Lenin, *What is To Be Done?*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, (Progress Publishers, 1964), 462.

III. THE STRUGGLE COMMITTEE IS FORMED

The First General Assembly in the Park

Finding a suitable space for mass meetings constituted a persistent political problem throughout the sequence. Holding meetings inside the housing complex was out of the question because management could easily attend them and tenants would not be able to speak freely. Moreover, there was no access to the community room that did not require going through the management or the tenants' association. Although churches with deep roots among the broad masses exist throughout the neighborhood, pastors were generally reluctant to support the struggle.

One such pastor whose church is directly across from the complex told us that he and local politicians had known about plans to massively displace the tenants from the buildings for six years. He characterized the fact that most of his congregation lives in the housing complex as "unfortunate."

It is under these circumstances that we decided to hold general assemblies in a nearby park. At the first GA, we called for the formation of an autonomous mass organization, a struggle committee. Those present immediately took up this call and the struggle committee was swiftly consolidated under the name 'J— R— Struggle Committee' (JRSC).[19]

The JRSC was formed out of those tenants who actively supported the workers. The political basis of unity was never very clear, and even less so at this initial stage, when the ideological formation of the advanced, intermediate and backwards had barely just begun.[20]

Our call was to constitute the struggle committee on the basis of *anti-corporatism*, which can be summed up as: no to negotiation, collaboration or co-management with the class enemy; yes to organization outside existing reformist frameworks, yes to the imposition of demands on the class enemy.

In addition to anti-corporatism, we called for two other principles to be imple-

19 The housing complex is known colloquially as "J— R— Houses," hence the name given to the struggle committee.

20 Ultimately, this lack of clarity regarding the political identity of the organization had to be referred to our failure to practice the mass line on the question of organization. We will develop this point further along in this summation.

mented, with limited success:

—all combative elements, workers and tenants, must bring the struggle by mobilizing the broad worker and tenant masses, in the building complex and beyond;
—the organization must practice mass proletarian democracy in order to liberate proletarian initiative and reinforce worker-tenant unity.

The principle of anti-corporatism in particular may raise the question: does the construction of an autonomous mass organization represent a form of 'left' opportunism? Surely, as we know from Lenin, it is sheer childishness to put forth autonomy as a *principle*.

To this objection, we would reply: yes, but here we must be careful. While it is infantile to refuse the possibility of *tactical* participation in bourgeois institutions, it is a universal principle of Marxism that the mass movement must not for all that become an instrument of the bourgeoisie – that is, it must be autonomous at the *strategic* level. *If the masses do not first seize politics for themselves from the proletarian perspective – if they do not first develop their ideological, political and organizational autonomy under proletarian leadership – then they will simply be instrumentalized by the bourgeoisie.* Communists must always proceed according to the steps and turns of the real revolutionary process, which can only be mastered in stages.

To correctly participate in bourgeois institutions and to practice class alliances, including – in certain conjunctures – tactical alliances with the bourgeoisie: before all else, these tasks require the working class to constitute itself as a class in the political sense, bearing a state project and organized as the Party that can lead the mass movement by developing its autonomy, by constructing the camp of the revolution. Today in the US, the mass movement is not independent of bourgeois forces and the bourgeois conception of the world, and the political existence of the proletariat is a project that is distant from being realized.

At a time when the broadest sections of the masses remain in the grip of reformism – petty-bourgeois and bourgeois political ideology imported into the working class – communist organization must proceed from the following fact: *the principal aspect of the class struggle today is ideological.* This is not a directive of purely conjunctural significance. The need to first of all put proletarian ideology in command through a consequential application of the mass line is a *general directive* that comes down to us from the GPCR.[21]

21 See, for example, the first of the 'Sixteen Points,' in which Mao is quoted as saying: "To overthrow a political power, it is always necessary, first of all, to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere." *Important Documents on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China* (Foreign Languages Press, 1970), 130.

To put proletarian ideology in command is to properly establish a relation of leadership vis-à-vis the broad masses by resolving contradictions among the people in order to bring a consequential struggle against the class enemy. It is by forging such a combative unity that we make a genuine *force* out of proletarian ideology.

Proletarian ideology must be grasped in relation to a conception of politics that was elaborated during the GPCR. While politics in its strategic dimension directly concerns the class state apparatus, with the army and the police at its core, we cannot restrict our conception of politics to the direct struggle for state power. The bourgeoisie consolidates its power in numerous 'independent kingdoms,' sites where tactical questions of power were posed by the masses throughout the GPCR. Hence the path of mass politics divides into its strategic and tactical sides: bombard the headquarters (strategy), occupy the independent kingdoms (tactics).[22] The construction of red power in the concrete local situation is a tactics with respect to the strategic question of state power.

If we don't see questions of power posed in every concrete struggle – if we identify economism simply with organizing in the workplace as such, or with any and every struggle that involves 'economic' demands, rather than fundamentally with a narrowness of perspective – then only propaganda and ideas can build the Party. This is a serious error – indeed, that of economism itself. *The concrete struggle on this side, politics exiled to the level of the whole: this is the very definition of economism*. The Party will be built in the mass movement by putting proletarian ideology in command in each concrete class situation where questions of power are posed, whether on the worker front or on another front.

If we define and practice the 'political struggle' in strict opposition to the 'economic struggle,' then no revolutionary politics will be possible today, and we will arrest the development of the class struggle in its proper, political sense – the sense that Marx gave to it when he wrote, "every class struggle is a political struggle."[23] This is the class struggle understood as the independent and active politics of the proletariat and the people, with state power as its ultimate aim. Proletarian ideology is the systematic and conscious representation of this politics.

It is in light of the primacy of ideological struggle and the need to develop the autonomy of the mass movement that we have taken up the construction of revolu-

22 "It is essential for the workers and People's Liberation Army fighters to go to those places where intellectuals are concentrated, be they schools or other units, to smash the complete domination by intellectuals, occupy the 'independent kingdoms,' big or small, and take over those places where the advocates of the theory of 'many centers,' that is, the theory of 'no center,' are entrenched." Yao Wen-Yuan, *The Working Class Must Exercise Leadership In Everything*, in *Peking Review*, No. 35, August 30, 1968, p. 5.

23 Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 493.

tionary autonomous mass organizations as our central task, concentrated in the tactical slogan: "Struggle Committees Everywhere!" This slogan is a historical and concrete directive that serves a universal political principle. Its aim is to enable the broad masses in the conjuncture to develop their autonomy as they centralize elements of the revolutionary-popular program and take up the question of the Party.

While we failed in our task at bringing the question of the Party to the worker and tenant masses, the invention of the JRSC nevertheless represented a correct proletarian aspiration to build an autonomous mass apparatus on the worker and tenant fronts that could carry out the tasks of unification and organization outside reactionary mass organizations (the tenants' association and the trade union).

The Second General Assembly in the Park and the Means of Communication

The second GA was slightly larger than the first. Two proposals resulted from the second GA:

—to organize an action covering a fire-damaged hallway with big-character posters, to be drafted by tenants and denouncing the landlord and management;
—to publish a newsletter centralizing information and summations of the struggle from the perspective of the people.

Several workers and tenants produced big-character posters, and a small group hung the posters in a fire-damaged corridor. Two selections from the big-character posters:

you can't take it with you
to hell so please stop trying
to kill us for it.
go have yourself a nice
cocktail's of rats, roach
garbage, lies, fires, bed bugs,
water bugs, your train dog's
flooding, broken elevator, piss
shit, your mother, yourself, scabs
"scabs," "worker whore ..."
hi Cracker, I hope you
suffer, Jerry Springer son.
choke on the ashes of the fire
you started!

DEAR MANAGEMENT
HOW DO YOU SLEEP AT
NIGHT?
go eat your mother's heart
out cause she did not give
you one!
What do you see when you
look in the mirrow "grinch"
Its not too late for your mom
to abort you
mirrow mirrow on the wall
who is the biggest Ass of All

Although there were few participants involved in actually hanging the posters, the operation materialized a collective practice among tenants and workers, since the action was the result of a decision taken at the GA and the materials were produced by a broad group of tenants and workers. We must never, in simplistic fashion, deduce the character of a battle or campaign solely from the section of the masses that is visibly active in carrying it out.

The head of the tenants' association would later tell us that she removed one of the posters. The poster in question bore the slogan: "Workers and Tenants Unite! We won't go!" Around this time, we distributed posters bearing this slogan to tenants, and they appeared in the windows of street-facing apartments in the complex.[24] The remainder of the posters were ripped down by the management.

Another tenant carried out a solo poster-hanging effort at 4 a.m. in public spaces throughout the housing complex.

Throughout the course of the struggle, the JRSC drafted and distributed three newsletters, together with other advanced tenants and workers. In "On Maoist Practice," we wrote: "Every political tract, every flyer, every poster, every booklet, is a summation in embryo. Maoists must include advanced mass contacts in the drafting, editing and distribution of each item of popular writing." During the sequence, we implemented this directive.

The three newsletters, along with the numerous leaflets and banners we made throughout the sequence, were efforts at practicing the mass line regarding the means of communication.[25]

The production and distribution of media throughout the worker and tenant

24 See cover photo.

25 See Appendix A for extracts from the three popular newsletters, redacted mainly to protect worker, tenant, and neighborhood contacts.

struggle represented a genuine appropriation of the task by the broad masses of the center, including many who were not organized in the JRSC. When, at a meeting of the struggle committee, we presented a draft piece for our second newsletter written and signed by the MCG, those present refused to include it in the newsletter until they substantially edited the piece and changed the attribution of authorship to the struggle committee.

The manner in which we produce leaflets, tracts and newsletters represents a necessary corrective to the dominant small-group practice of excluding the masses from participating in the production, editing and distribution of the means of communication.

One tenant member of the JRSC spent an afternoon making an image for a leaflet depicting weighing scales, "The Capitalist Ruling Class vs. the People." On the lighter scale, titled "Capitali$t Ruling Cla$$," she arranged the bosses, landlords, banks, courts, cops and lawyers. On the heavier scale, titled "The People United," she arranged the neighborhood, tenants and workers. Her illustration demonstrated that our summations and educational work had consequential ideological effects, even if they were temporary, linked to particular moments in the sequence.

The distribution of newsletters and leaflets inside the building was, for most of the struggle, almost exclusively carried out by tenants and workers. Towards the end of the sequence, we realized this was an error – in fact, worse than an error: it was a missed opportunity. Since we were largely absent from the distribution process, we were unable to systematically gather the ideas of the tenant masses, much less

to serve as the instrument of unity of the people by issuing correct directives.

The result was that no directive of any consequence saw the light of day throughout the struggle, as the mass line on the question of unity was stillborn.

IV. STRUGGLES WITH BOURGEOIS INSTITUTIONS

The Second Tenants' Association Meeting

Fewer tenants attended the second tenants' association meeting in comparison with the first one. The decline in mass participation and continuous reinforcement of rightist leadership would continue without reversal until the end of the sequence.

Before the meeting, the JRSC met separately to discuss the line we would take at the meeting. At the meeting itself, the recently-formed struggle committee sat together on one side of the meeting room.

At the beginning of the meeting, JRSC members distributed leaflets to everyone present exposing the collaborationism of the tenants' association, in particular its unwillingness to support the worker struggle and its private meetings with management. As the leaflets were distributed, the tenants' association officers sat at the front of the room, nervously reading them. They opened the meeting by immediately addressing the matter of private meetings with management, admitting to having made deals with management, but placing blame on one particular officer whom they claim had already been "taken care of" (expelled, although she was later brought back). One tenants' association officer remarked that, in any case, "management doesn't care about making money! They told us that themselves. They're not going to throw us out."

Another officer of the tenants' association spoke about the workers' situation to the audience, mainly because one of the worker-tenants was present: "No one knows what to do. No one has taken a stand." This was a ludicrous claim—the stand that the tenants' association took throughout the duration of the sequence was to blame tenants themselves for the conditions in the complex and to divide the tenant struggle from the worker struggle. The worker-tenant, challenging the officer, responded with clarity that the enemy was management, and all efforts should be concentrated against it: "You've got to get the head of the snake!"

This officer was then forced to claim that as an individual she supported the workers. However, she simultaneously asserted that the tenants' association did not "have any authority to make management change the situation of the workers" and that the workers "are in a good union." The officers then moved on to talking about our presence. The tenants' association, however, could no longer claim that we were outsiders, as they did at their first meeting, since many tenants recognized us from the daily picket, and in the meeting we constituted a visible bloc

together with the other members of the JRSC.

The open display of tenant support forced the tenants' association officers to allow one of us to address the room: "We are here to support the struggles of the workers and tenants against the landlord. The class enemy is clear. Victory is only possible if we rely on the people, not the institutions of the politicians, the union, the courts and the police." The statement was met with resounding applause and cheering, the loudest of the evening.

This indicates the spontaneous materialism of the masses: they see who is on the picket with them every day, they see who organizes their power and shares their aspiration to transform the class situation. Attacks on us were often met by the retort: "Where have you been? They've been with us from day one! They are part of us."

As the meeting drew to a close, a tenant raised her hand to assert that she had overheard one of the tenants' association officers mutter something negative about the Maoists under her breath. A sharp exchange followed, and the tenant in question physically charged the tenants' association officer, leading to a near-fist-fight between the two sides, as the room erupted into chaos. Tenants held back the would-be combatants as the visibly-shaken tenants' association officer loudly proclaimed her progressive credentials to the crowd.

Other Confrontations

Confrontations with Management

—A comrade on the picket line confronted a supervisor who was notorious for his racist harassment of workers and tenants. The comrade yelled, "You racist cracker! You feel good kicking Black people out of the neighborhood?" The workers joined in, shouting, "Cracker! Peckerwood!" Right away, the union staffer on site tried to put a stop to the yelling, because it was "racial" and because "the union book says you can't do that." An argument then broke out between the workers and the union staffer.

—Encouraged by tenants shouting from their windows, workers and comrades on the picket line verbally attacked a supervisor, who immediately called the cops. Demonstrating the persistence of the notion that the police are neutral, the workers and a tenant tried to file reports for harassment against the supervisor. After the cops left, the supervisor walked out of the complex with a security guard as her escort. The workers and comrades resumed their yelling, while the union staffer now joined in, loudly barking at her like a dog in a belated attempt to demonstrate that he was on their side.

—On a different day, militants put up a banner at the picket. Tenants shouted from their windows in support. Seeing the banner, the supervisor called the cops again. This time, the cops threatened the workers, telling them that they needed to get a permit for the picket line. The banner stayed up. The supervisors took photographs of it from a distance, likely to send to their lawyers.

Confrontation with Building Security and Police – the Third General Assembly in the Park

—While approximately a dozen tenants gathered with comrades for the third GA, the head of building security walked through to spy on the meeting. A comrade immediately began following and photographing him, sparking a yelling match between Maoists and the security pig. He threatened the comrade: "I'll break you in half!"

—Later that afternoon, while attempting to conduct door-to-door work, several building security officers closely trailed comrades through the building, piled into the same elevator, and then followed the comrades to the door of a tenants' apartment where the comrades were gathered. One officer remained posted in the hallway, keeping watch at the door for the next hour. Four tenant contacts split up into two groups to go door-to-door. A group of NYPD cops confronted the tenants and threatened to arrest them if they failed to show proper identification.

Confrontation with the Cops

—One afternoon, someone unknown to us slashed the tires of the site manager's car. The cops approached the picket in order to lecture comrades and the workers: "you guys are bringing more attraction to this building … Whoever has warrants in this building, whoever is a felon – has a felony past history, they're gonna start kicking people out." Militancy was to be paid for with the apartments of tenants. The workers on the picket were indignant, but the isolated nature of the incident meant that the lesson was ultimately lost, despite a concerted effort on the part of comrades to discuss, concretely analyze and popularize it.

Workers Spread Trash

—Trash remained uncollected and piled up in the area adjacent to the picket. This was the result of solidarity by sanitation workers with the picket. A militant sanitation worker who we knew from a previous period of mass meetings had taken leaflets to distribute to her coworkers. One day, the workers on the picket decided to spread the trash across the sidewalk. Workers blocked scabs from picking up the trash and confronted the building supervisor and a representative from management. Eventually, the sanitation police arrived to pick up the trash. We later learned that the tenants' association had called a local politician, who in turn had

called the sanitation police.

All but the most advanced tenants could not understand why it was important for the trash to remain uncollected: partial interests continued to dominate the perspective of the whole, individualism continued to dominate collectivism.

Second Trade Union Rally

—The union brought out around 150 rank-and-file workers from other job sites to a rally marked by a series of scripted speeches by the union bosses and local Democratic Party politicians. The workers insisted to the union that all members of the JRSC be allowed to address the rally from the stage. Indeed, this was the only role that the workers played in organizing the proceedings. Struggle committee members, including both Maoists and tenants, lined up to address the rally.

One comrade took the stage and denounced the union bosses, the local politicians and the landlord. The assembled workers cheered and clapped. The speech explicitly related the labor struggle to the housing struggle, and both to capitalist exploitation and white-supremacist national oppression. While the speech received a warm welcome by the rank-and-file workers, the union officials quickly cut it short and refused to let the other members of the JRSC speak.

One union official approached the comrade who had spoken and shouted in his face: "I can't believe you used the word 'capitalist'!! What is this? 1982?"

For months afterwards, the workers and many tenants recounted their satisfaction in seeing the faces of the now-hated union bosses turn red and sweaty with anger. The incident of the speech at the rally would serve as a key reference point for the workers in explaining why the union and management were forced to negotiate a partial reinstatement of workers.

Negative Autonomy, Positive Autonomy

When communists proceed to develop the autonomy of the masses in a practical-concrete and negative fashion, by reacting to the maneuvers of the class enemy, the task of enabling the worker and tenant masses to construct that enemy in the political sense is endless. Each institution, objectively part of the enemy camp, must be subjectively constructed in turn: the tenants' association, the trade union, the police, the media, the courts, the landlord, the management, the local church…. The enemy is constructed solely in relation to the dynamics of the current moment, and the concrete perspective of the whole is never reached.

In fact, genuine autonomy cannot be grasped simply as a critique of bourgeois class practices. Autonomy in the mass movement requires systematic leadership that can put forward a firm proletarian perspective on the internal nature of the bourgeois state project as it advances the state project of the proletariat. Autonomy thus divides into its conscious-proletarian and practical-oppositionist sides. The struggle committee materialized proletarian aspirations to unity and organization, but it was unable to divide from reformist *conceptions* of struggle – even if it maintained its autonomy in relation to reformist organizations.

The JRSC was thus constituted on the basis of tactical oppositionism: to the trade union, the tenants' association, the landlord, management, and (at times) the courts, media and police. It could not firmly take in hand the question of the Party in part because its positive political project was imprecise from beginning to end.

Against the betrayals of the trade union and tenants' association, the JRSC took up the worker and tenant struggles in a more or less militant fashion. *However, to militate hard at a practical-concrete level against reformist practices is something other than breaking with the bourgeois political and ideological basis of those practices*. The JRSC took up the trade union struggle outside the trade union, and the tenant's association struggle outside the tenants' association, and thus remained stuck in the logic of demand economism. At most, it served as a kind of 'hard' social force, auxiliary in relation to the trade union and the tenants' association.

The core of the problem was indicated by the incomprehension of tenants regarding the spreading of trash outside the building. Contradictions among the people remained unresolved, both those between the tenants and the workers – reinforced by the 'demand' nature of each struggle – and those among the tenants. The masses did not engage the process of taking power *over themselves* in order to transform the concrete situation.

It was the Maoist core that was responsible for the whole, for taking in hand the resolution of contradictions among the people. In the absence of proletarian leadership, the convergence of worker demands and tenant demands was left to sloganeering and spontaneity. We neglected to formulate directives that aimed to destroy the material supports of the contradictions that blocked the constitution of a revolutionary camp.

For example, broad sections of tenants persistently claimed that the workers were fired due to laziness (despite the fact that it is impossible for a handful of workers to clean and maintain a massive building complex). This could have been transformed by taking up the repeated proposals, raised by certain tenants, for organizing collective cleanups together with the workers, in the vein of *subbotniks*, or communist volunteer days. At the time, we dogmatically rejected these proposals as 'economistic.' This rejection demonstrated our failure to assess every proposal,

every element of program, every action, in its material capacity to build political unity or division, autonomy or dependence, as we advance in the consolidation of the revolutionary camp. If we abstractly set strategy and revolution against the struggle and immediate demands, without mastering the practice of correctly articulating one with the other, then it is the pole of the struggle and immediate demands that will be victorious – every time.

The contradictions between the workers and the tenants did not uniquely proceed from the side of the tenants. The workers persistently claimed that only a narrow section of tenants supported them, although in reality a large section of the tenants were passive supporters of their struggle. The Maoists could have taken up the task of organizing a tenant demonstration on the picket line in order to deal with this perception.

Beyond such initiatives, we should have organized meetings on a large scale in which the workers and various sections of the tenants collectively discussed their respective demands as a point of departure for developing specific proposals. The meetings and general assemblies that we held tended to attract specific layers of tenants, generally semi-proletarian supporters of the fired maintenance workers. Our unfulfilled duty was to organize a genuine political debate involving *all* sections of the tenants together with the workers, in order to begin the process of resolving contradictions among the people, because such debates allow each section of the people to concretely grasp the struggles of the other sections.

Tenant Declaration

We did put forward – and partially implemented – one proposal that aimed both to demonstrate, to the workers, the existence of broad tenant support for their struggle, and to establish systematic contact between the class organization and the tenants. The immediate occasion for the proposal was the upcoming trial before the labor board. We wanted to show that, no matter what happened in the trial, there was a potential camp of the revolution that, if organized, might eventually impose a victorious resolution on the landlord and management.

A tenant member of the struggle committee – at the initiative of the Maoists – drafted a declaration combining tenant demands with worker demands. This draft was then edited with tenants in and around the struggle committee. The main demands were for free community space and for the reinstatement of the workers. The question of how to formulate demands constituted the main topic of struggle within the JRSC. The intermediate members at first wanted to draft the demands in the form of a petition, while the advanced and the Maoists insisted on formulating them as a declaration – that is, as a weapon of popular will opposed

to any form of negotiation.

One militant joined an advanced tenant in going door-to-door on two full floors of the building complex, gathering signatures and speaking with tenants in their apartments. At the end of two four-hour days of door-to-door work – in addition to tabling outside the building together with tenants – we gathered a number of tenant signatures, which we intended to publish in the next JRSC newsletter.

The problem with the declaration was that it was not the product of wide debate and ideological struggle among the broad tenant masses. It was drafted by one tenant and discussed by the struggle committee alone. When we went door-to-door, we did not systematically gather ideas, nor did we propose a concrete action (demonstration, mass meeting), but we simply asked for signatures. This could not lead to a consequential process of organizing the political unity of the tenants and workers.

V. RESOLUTION OF THE WORKER STRUGGLE

The resolution of the worker struggle was swift, and came without warning. The trade union negotiated a deal with the management that included a $70,000 payout for themselves and the dismissal of nearly half the workers with minimal compensation. The union placed tremendous pressure on the workers to accept the deal. At first, the workers refused. Eventually, one worker capitulated. One by one, the workers gave in, despite our best efforts to support their continued resistance. They blamed the union, they blamed each other.

Our failure to construct the united front in the complex under proletarian leadership meant that the autonomous mass organization had at that moment lost its reason for existence in the complex. Since the worker struggle had been brought in a local and artisanal manner, enclosed within the borders of the class situation, its resolution represented the effective end of the JRSC as a material force in the complex. Our tactical opportunism – which followed from our inability to establish permanent collective practices among the people that might master the contradictions that divided them – condemned the struggle committee to a merely temporary unity that coincided with the active phase in the struggle.

The JRSC gathered an increasingly narrow section of the tenants of the center until it became an organization of the left alone. The tenants, divided and powerless, then fell under the leadership of the right. The worker and tenant masses had brought a hard struggle that was never *political*. This is because our practice as communists did not enable the masses to relate the popular struggle *as a whole* to the landlord-management and the bourgeois class state. The motor of the struggle could not be shifted from its immediate social causes to firm political consciousness.

However, the broad tenant masses in the complex grasped the resolution as a victory – and more than that: the fruit of hard struggle by the JRSC, and in particular the Maoist militants, and not as a collective victory of the tenants and workers over the exploitative and oppressive landlord and management. Six months later, workers and tenants were still thanking comrades for the victory – indeed, for a wide variety of ameliorations (e.g., new elevators), most of which we had little or nothing to do with. This reputation continues to resonate. When the landlord restricted the management company's activities, tenants in other low-income buildings credited the struggle committee with having imposed that outcome. The widespread view is that it is militants that make history, and not the broad masses.

After the resolution of the struggle, we attempted to make the JRSC live on in the complex by putting forward our analysis of the resolution – opposed to the positive assessment of the broad tenant masses, although for the moment echoed by the left among the workers and tenants: the resolution was unsatisfactory, the organization must live, the struggle continues. Together with advanced tenants and workers, we produced a newsletter that put forward this position, concentrated in the slogan: "9 WORKERS REDUCED TO 4 IS NOT A VICTORY!"[26]

In retrospect, this position was based on an analysis of an incorrect question. We proceeded by asking the economistic question: *was the resolution of the struggle objectively a victory or a failure for the worker and tenant masses, given the demands around which the struggle was waged?* This question reinforced the link between the life of the mass organization and the concrete struggle. Protracting the initial class situation became the essential condition for meeting our tactical need to make the mass organization live, which we identified with reinforcement of the popular camp. We treated the tasks of organization and unity as the combined product of the local struggle, which therefore had to be extended.

The 'protract the initial struggle' position was a serious error on our part. *The investigation following the struggle must be brought, not from the perspective of tactical needs of militants, but from the strategic perspective of the masses*. Instead of assessing the resolution of the struggle according to the degree that certain demands were satisfied, we should have investigated the political and ideological bases of its resolution: how can we sum up the struggle, alongside the broad masses, in terms of the consolidation and extension of the modest popular power conquered thanks to the combative unity – fragile, local and temporary as it was – that was forged in the struggle?

The question of popular power, posed from the perspective of the broad masses, necessarily brings with it the tasks of defending or extending what unity was constituted during the sequence.

In addition to linking unity with the question of popular power, the social investigation that followed the resolution of the struggle should also have posed the question of organization. Our directive failed to assign tasks to militants and the worker and tenant left in light of the urgent question we faced: *what was the political identity of the struggle committee as an organization?*

The Mass Line on the Question of Organization

The question of the Party had already been spontaneously posed by the masses in

26 See Appendix A.

the struggle as the aspiration for both unity and organization. The failure of the sequence turned on our incapacity to take up the question of the Party and link it to the perspective of the whole on the basis of uniting the people.

However, putting the struggle under proletarian leadership (unity) and building the Party in the mass movement (organization) must be clearly distinguished. Resolving contradictions among the people so as to make collectivism live as a class ideological orientation does not automatically bring with it collectivization of the political identity of the autonomous mass organization. Putting proletarian ideology in command and posing the question of the Party are distinct tasks.

The mass line on the question of organization requires that the members of the organization take up the question of its own identity, explicitly and throughout the course of the struggle:

What is the political meaning of the struggle committee? Is it a transitory and local organization of 'hard struggle' that forces a few partial concessions around narrow demands? Or is it a means of ensuring the survival of the workers and masses facing layoffs and increasing rents? What, in the specific project, bears with it the project of the whole? How are the specific questions and demands that define the concrete struggle generalizable, that is, capable of contributing to the construction of a party program? How, in other words, does the struggle committee, a form of organization that was constituted in a particular class situation, relate to the task of constructing the Party, the organization that will structure the mass movement on a national scale?

The political identity of the struggle committee was never very clear.

We spent a lot of time explaining the need for a party, educating workers and tenants alike on both the concept of the vanguard party and its history, and carrying out various related forms of propaganda and agitation. These are important practices in the process of posing the question of the Party. But in order to contribute to party building, they must participate in its material process, and this requires a systematization of mass ideas on the question of organization with a view to determining how the particular class situation bears the general project. Every class situation poses a concrete organizational problem, conveying the project of the whole, which must be explicitly taken up and debated if it is to be resolved victoriously.

The concrete form that the question of the Party must assume in the conjuncture can be broadly identified: it can only be taken up as a process of linking the project that emerges in the concrete situation with the building of *communist cores* distinct from the revolutionary mass organizations in which they play a leadership role. Communist cores are embryonic cells of the Party of a new type, sites

of organizing the class vanguard in the current stage of party building. Communist cores must be formed through a complex process centered on mass debate over concrete problems and organized study of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Only under the leadership of communist cores can revolutionary mass organizations centralize and develop the elements of the popular program as the masses consolidate the revolutionary camp.

Unable effectively to practice the mass line on the question of organization, we could not advance the building of communist cores in the concrete situation, and thus the struggle committee could not participate in the appropriation by the working class of its own subjective class identity.

The JRSC served as a vehicle of (1) militant support for the worker struggle and (2) immediate and tactical criticism of specific practices by the landlord-management, but it did not allow us pose the question of the Party in a conscious and scientific manner. The activities of the struggle committee were determined solely by the anti-class aspirations and needs of the broad masses as they were concretized in the immediate struggle. In the absence of proper class leadership and a positive revolutionary project of power, the struggle committee could prepare only various forms of capitulation.

VI. EXTENSION OF OUR MASS WORK

Mass political meeting of tenants from multiple housing complexes.

We cannot go beyond the internal characteristics of the mass movement. The sequence of the worker-tenant struggle in the housing complex had been exhausted. The task moving forward was to extend our organizational work beyond the complex to the whole of the territory of low-income housing facing liquidation at the hands of bourgeois forces. This work of extension involves a specific articulation between disparate class situations, with struggle committees to be formed at various levels: from each local site of struggle to the neighborhood as a whole. We have begun this work by systematically linking various class situations in low-income buildings, many managed by the same company that ran the housing complex discussed in this summation.

This neighborhood work will form the subject of a subsequent summation, as it belongs to a later, and more advanced, phase of our work. Here we must simply note that this mass work has allowed us to begin to rectify the errors we made during the worker and tenant struggle in the complex.

Our mass work following the intervention has included: organizing the remaining core of the struggle committee in order to support the formation of a struggle committee in another low-income building; holding mass political meetings with tenants from multiple buildings; winning back access to a community room that had been locked by management for over 15 years; and organizing a neighborhood anti-eviction struggle around a typical case. These activities have been carried out together with tenants' associations and prominent Black nationalists in the neighborhood. Our position throughout has proceeded from the left road as it lives among the masses, namely: these struggles are episodes in a struggle for survival, the Black masses must remain in the neighborhood – it is not enough to make the bourgeoisie pay for your disappearance, through buyouts and other means.

Building the united front:
mass political meeting organized together with Black nationalists.

By following real social links where they exist in order to multiply fronts and sites of struggle, we have been able to broaden the foundation of unity. We have initiated the task of developing collective practices among the masses while allowing them to construct the enemy from the perspective of the complex material reality in which they are embedded. We have been able to do this without conceding anything to the enemy regarding the stakes of the struggle.

The key lesson here is that we must not broaden our mass work by choosing weakened stakes that tail the democratic aspirations of the broad intermediate layers, but rather by supporting the left of the mass movement in its efforts to link concrete forms of proletarian initiative in different class situations. This is an absolute requirement if we are to support the autonomy of the mass movement in its positive sense, as the collective task of advancing the project of the whole, step by step: the Party, the revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

By extending our mass work out of local situations, we are forced to proceed on the basis of organizing the collective unity of the people, and not on the basis of combat against a specific class enemy. For Maoists, to lead is to link the resolution of contradictions among the people (unity) to combat against the class enemy

(struggle) *on the basis of unity*. In the unity-struggle dialectic, unity is strategically principal.

The political identity of the proletariat, constituted through the relation of leadership, is defined according to a dialectic of unity and struggle between three terms: the working class itself, the broad masses and the bourgeois class state. The working class becomes a class in the political sense, the *proletariat*, as it unites itself and the whole people in the class struggle against the bourgeois state. The proletariat, in Lenin's words, "represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organized political force."[27]

Only once we master the dialectic between unity and struggle that gives the relation of leadership its political content can we properly pose the question of the Party, so that the worker and popular masses can take it up as a conscious and practical task.

27 Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, 400.

APPENDIX A:

Extracts from Popular Newsletters

NEIGHBORHOOD, WORKERS & TENANTS UNITE AGAINST THE BLOODSUCKING LANDLORD$

A CALL FOR A [redacted] STRUGGLE COMMITTEE OF TENANTS, WORKERS & NEIGHBORHOOD

MEETING

[redacted]

[redacted]).

First, the bloodsucking landlord attacked the unionized workers—[redacted] cutting their pay in half, robbing them of their vacation days, 401k, sick days and pensions, and finally **firing them**.

"It's a shame that when new owners buy property in the neighborhood they have no concern for the people who have worked here for 20 or more years. They come into our neighborhood and get rid of the union workers, like they don't have family to take care of, because they don't want to pay the union workers a union wage. So they fire us, go to the shelter, and get a couple of guys and pay them $10/hour. Not only did they get rid of us, I feel like the tenants in the building need to come together with the union workers. **It's us today and them tomorrow.** It would be highly appreciated for those who are reading this and can understand where I'm coming from to come out and support us at [redacted]."

– [redacted] on the picket line

Now the landlord and management are going after the tenants. They have already sent out letters to many of you asking for receipts from the past five months, charged for that rent all over again, locked the community room, refused to sign off on Section 8 papers and raised the cost of laundry. There were three mysterious fires in the building earlier this month….

Continued on next page

"It's stressful out here. I want my job back. We want the union back in the building. I've been working here since '84."

– [redacted] on the picket line

Over the next two years, we can expect massive rising rents, mass evictions and finally the conversion of the home of mostly Black working-class tenants into a luxury complex for the white and wealthy. **THE ENEMY DID NOT BUY A BUILDING FOR [redacted] IN ORDER TO RENOVATE IT FOR YOU!!!** We asked the management if they planned on knocking down the building in order to create luxury apartments? Their answer was a question: "Would you live there?" That tells us everything we need to know! The landlord and management want to drive Black working-class people out of the building and out of the neighborhood. **IF THIS BUILDING FALLS, IT'S A WRAP FOR THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.**

Meanwhile, management holds meetings with local politicians and the leadership of the tenants association. **Why is management friendly toward the tenants association? WHY DID [redacted] THE FACE OF MANAGEMENT, INSTRUCT US TO SPEAK WITH THE LEADERSHIP OF THE TENANTS ASSOCIATION?** Why does the tenants association divide the tenants from the workers and both from the neighborhood? Why has the tenants association **failed** to urge you to join the fired workers every day on the picket line? **The sell-out is being prepared behind closed doors.**

At the recent meeting in the courtyard, the tenant's association offered individual solutions to the problem tenants are facing: "save your receipts, look at papers before you sign them…." BUT THIS IS A COLLECTIVE PROBLEM THAT DEMANDS A COLLECTIVE SOLUTION. Yes, you should save your receipts, yes you should look carefully at documents, but if that's all you do, YOU WILL END UP IN THE SHELTER WITH YOUR NICE PILE OF RECEIPTS.

In the face of this brutal situation, we are calling for the formation of a joint worker, tenant and neighborhood committee—**the [redacted] Struggle Committee**—which will unite all who can be united **to reinstate the fired workers now** and organize for the protracted struggle to come. We believe that only organized militant action will allow the workers to be re-instated and the building to be saved for its tenants. We cannot solely rely on the courts—after all, in this capitalist and white-supremacist society, displacing working class Black and Latino tenants is LEGAL. So what we need is **organized people's power. NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR TENANTS AND WORKERS AND NEIGHBORHOOD SUPPORTERS TO BE FIGHTING AMONG EACH OTHER. IF WE ARE DIVIDED, THE BUILDING WILL FALL.**

IF WE WAIT UNTIL THE LANDLORD$ AND MANAGEMENT GIVE THE ORDERS TO KICK YOU OUT AND KNOCK DOWN THE BUILDING, IT WILL BE TOO LATE. THE TIME TO ORGANIZE IS ***NOW***!

MESSAGE FROM COMRADE [redacted], MEMBER OF THE STRUGGLE COMMITTEES INITIATIVE, WHO GREW UP ON [redacted]

"Tenants & Workers. This is A Real Important Moment. We RR underAttack.. We need to Unite As One. Outside Forces Want to See us Gone. Homeless. Starving. Divided As A Ppl. Confused... The Capitalist$ Want Our Blood. Our Homes. They Don't Give A Fck Abt Us!!!! These RR Actual Facts... And anyone w eyes can see this... So my question is.... What RR We going to do Abt It!?!? RR We going to continue to B exploited. Lied to. Deceived. Displaced from our Community and Neighborhood?! No!!! No!!! We Must Fight With All Our Might! We Will B Victorious. We Will Organize... We Will Defeat This Capitalist Beast... Push Back These Blood Sucking Monsters. We As The People Must B Alert And Aware. We Must B United. We Have To Stand Strong. There's Nothing To Fear. We have Nothing To Lose but Everything To Gain @ this Moment. Without The People We Have No Fight..... Calling All Workers & Tenants Its On Us Now... U RR The Leader. U RR the One Who Will Make This Change. You! If Not You Than Who Will ? This Is Your Battle.. This Is Your War... Against Our Common And Known Enemy!!!"

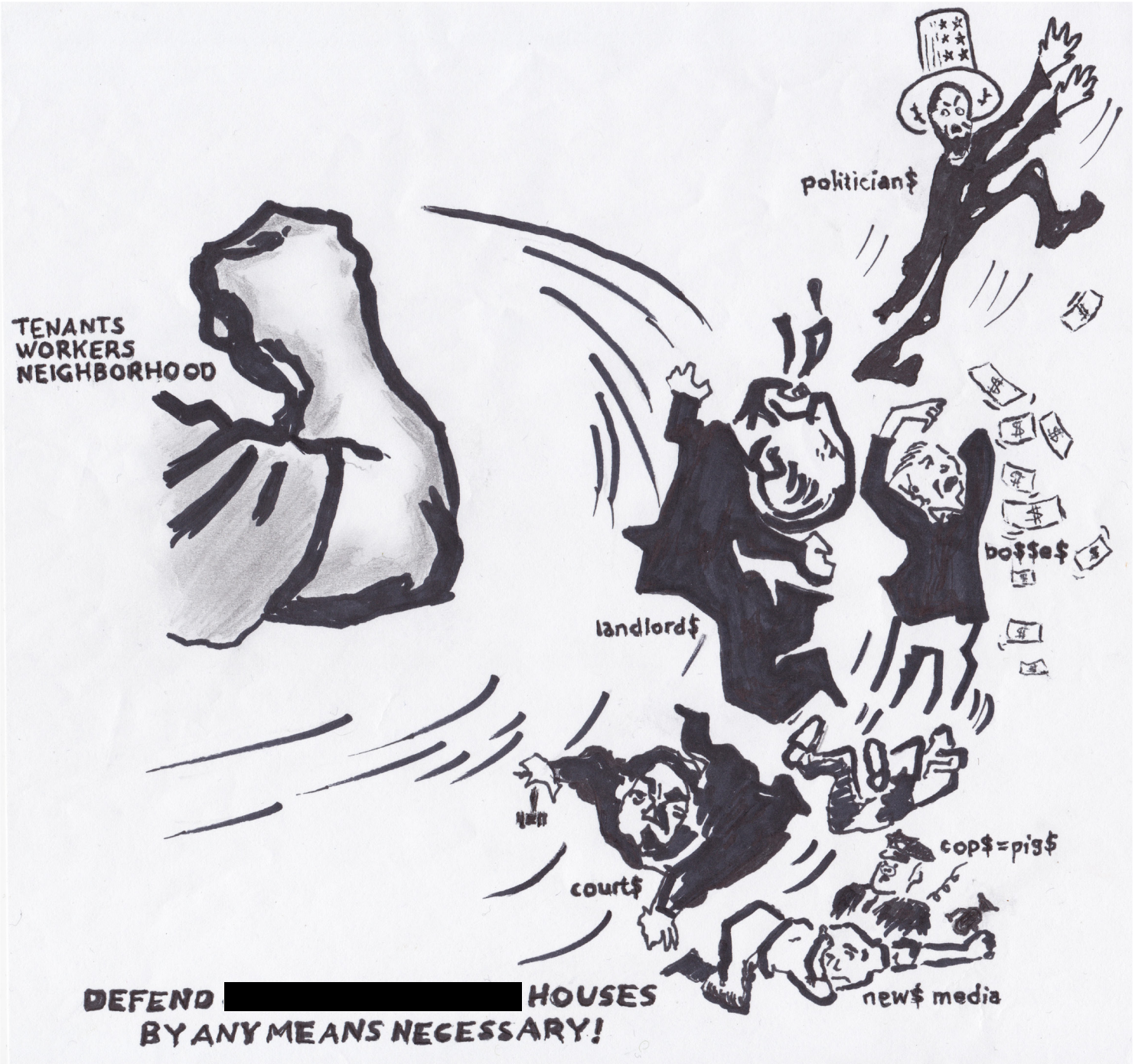
STRUGGLE COMMITTEES INITIATIVE

[redacted]

The Struggle

[redacted] [redacted] STRUGGLE COMMITTEE

VOL. 1 NO. 1



THE PEOPLE VS. THE CAPITALI$T RULING CLASS

TENANTS & WORKERS SPEAK ON THE LINE:

"If the tenants stuck together on this, things wouldn't have gotten this far. This is where it starts. They come after union workers. Then, they come after your apartments. If you're weak, they'll get you all up out of here. When they see there is no unity in this building, that's when it will start." —A tenant

"The tenants need to come out and stick together. Come out! Stop looking out your windows—you won't have none soon. Come out!" —A tenant

"We need tenant support. If we don't come together, we not gonna be strong. Once they start moving motherfuckers out, then the people will come out. But, then it'll be too late." —A worker

"I want the Tenants Association demolished. They never helped nobody. They are a fucking joke. Please. They are full of shit and we want to dismantle it immediately." —A tenant

"[redacted] makes puppets for sale out of [redacted] material. They got a [redacted] puppet and a [redacted] puppet, with scabs sold separately." —A worker

[redacted]

"IT'S A SHAME!"

It's a shame that when new owners buy property in the neighborhood they have no concern for the people who have worked here for 20 or more years. They come into our neighborhood and get rid of the union workers, like they don't have family to take care of, because they don't want to pay the union workers a union wage. So they fire us, go to the shelter, and get a couple of guys and pay them $10/hour. Not only did they get rid of us, I feel like the tenants in the building need to come together with the union workers. It's us today and them tomorrow. It would be highly appreciated for those who are reading this and can understand where I'm coming from to come out and support us at [redacted]

I want my job back and I'm not going anywhere!

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

"B. is an elderly lady. She has a big hole in her bathroom. There are mushrooms and mold growing, and water leaking. She keeps going to the hospital every week with a bacterial infection. She has been calling MANAGEMENT every day about the situation and NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE! ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!"

A general assembly called by the [redacted] Struggle Committee

BUILDING RED POWER

The struggle at [redacted] Houses is an important battle in the ongoing war being waged by the capitalist class against the Black working class.

There are **two sides** in this struggle. On the one hand, there are **the people**: workers, tenants and the mass of people in the neighborhood. On the other hand, there is **the capitalist class**: the landlord$, the bo$$e$, the cop$=pig$, the court$, the lawyer$, the new$ media, the politician$...

This is a **daily war for power.** The capitalist class is coming after us:

—first, **they take good union jobs away**, leaving us without a steady income. They did this when they fired the workers.

—then, they **take our homes away**, putting us in the shelter. This has been the plan of [redacted] and [redacted] for years, according to many sources. They plan on turning the apartment into luxury housing for the white and wealthy. YOU WILL *NOT* GET A PAYOUT.

—then, when you do what you have to do to make ends meet, **they send the pig$ to take you away** to Rikers.

—and the most fucked up part of it is that they make you think that it is all YOUR fault, **taking your mind away.**

We need to organize ourselves, by ourselves, for ourselves.

We can't rely on the enemy to save us. It won't happen. The courts are capitalist courts, the lawyers are capitalist lawyers, the politicians are capitalist politicians. They are NOT ON YOUR SIDE.

We need to build and organize our own power. We have the numbers.

Since red is the symbol of the working class, we say: ***we must build RED POWER in [redacted] Houses.***

Building Red Power means that WE decide how to use OUR community room and courtyards.

Building Red Power means that WE look after the building to make sure it is clean and safe.

Building Red Power means that WE REFUSE TO PAY HIGHER RENTS and WE REFUSE TO LEAVE THE BUILDING UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

In short, building Red Power means that WE have power over the places where we live and work.

In order to build Red Power, we must **UNITE AGAINST OUR COMMON ENEMY.** ***ANY BLOW AGAINST THE CLASS ENEMY IS A VICTORY FOR THE PEOPLE!***

Now is not the time for petty squabbles, for blaming your neighbor.

Now is the time to LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, and to turn that love into a WEAPON with which to strike the enemy!

—Maoist Communist Group

TENANTS, WORKERS AND NEIGHBORHOOD UNITED! WE WON'T GO!

"WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE AND EVERYTHING TO GAIN!"

"Tenants & Workers. This is A Real Important Moment. We RR underAttack. **We need to Unite As One.** Outside Forces Want to See us Gone. Homeless. Starving. Divided As A Ppl. Confused.. The Capitalist$ Want Our Blood. Our Homes. They Don't Give A Fck Abt Us!!!! These RR Actual Facts... And anyone w eyes can see this... So my question is.... What RR We going to do Abt It!?!? RR We going to continue to B exploited. Lied to. Deceived. Displaced from our Community and Neighborhood?! No!!! No!!! We Must Fight With All Our Might! We Will B Victorious. We Will Organize... We Will Defeat This Capitalist Beast... Push Back These Blood Sucking Mothers. We As The People Must B Alert And Aware. We Must B United. We Have To Stand Strong. There's Nothing To Fear. We Have Nothing To Lose but Everything To Gain @ this Moment. Without The People We Have No Fight..... Calling All Workers & Tenants Its On Us Now... U RR The Leader. U RR the One Who Will Make This Change. You! If Not You Than Who Will? This Is Your Battle.. This Is Your War... Against Our Common and Known Enemy!!!"

—Comrade [redacted] of the [redacted] Struggle Committee

The Struggle

9 WORKERS REDUCED TO 4 IS NOT A VICTORY!

OACHES IN MY APARTMENT. IT NEEDS
VE EXTERMINATION."
"I AM DISABLED, LIVE ON THE THIRD FLOOR, HAVE NO ELEVATOR AND VERY POOR LIGHTS."
"MY HOUSE HASN'T BEEN PAINTED IN YEARS."
"WE NEED MORE GARBAGE PICK-UP."
"I HAVE A STOPPED UP TOILET AND A LEAKY SINK."
OPD
OPD
"STOP THE POLICE HARASSMENT."
YEARS PASS AND NOTHING HAPPENS.
"STAIRS THAT NEED REPAIR ARE HAZARDOUS TO OUR HEALTH."
"MY CHILDREN HAVE NO PLACE TO PLAY."

ONE WORKER PER BUILDING IS NOT ENOUGH!

THE [redacted] NEWS FROM STRUGGLE COMMITTEE

VOL. 1 NO. 2

SUMMARY OF THE STRUGGLE AT THE [redacted] [redacted] HOUSES

- Earlier this year, landlord [redacted] bought the buildings for [redacted] and hired [redacted] [redacted]
- Many sources confirm that management is getting rid of subsidies. Their plan is to move out low-income tenants and build luxury apartments for the white and wealthy.
- Management cut workers' pay and benefits, then fired all the unionized workers.
- A continuous series of "mysterious" fires have been set in the building. Section 8 won't pay subsidies for some tenants because the fire damage has not been cleaned.
- Some tenants, neig s workers form the [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] Struggle Committee to fight the mass eviction of the tenants and firing of the workers. They are harassed by cops, the Tenants Association, Security (who spy on their meetings) and the union bosses.
- Management, the cops and the Tenants Association all blame the workers and/or tenants for the fires.
- Broken elevators have remained unrepaired for months and months. Instead of fixing them, the new management spends money on security cameras to monitor the tenants and re-paved the parking lots that tenants can't park on. It took someone getting hurt for them to do over the messed up sidewalk. A door fell off of over 20 mailboxes and tenants have to go to the post office to retrieve their mail. When this problem was brought to management's attention, they said that they are not responsible.
- Common areas have been taken away: no more community room, no more BBQs in the courtyard, no more parking lot….
- **The union bosses SELL OUT the workers and call it a victory: (1) The situation began with NINE workers. Now there are only FOUR workers. That is a BIG LOSS of union jobs. (2) [redacted] got a payout of over [redacted] as part of the settlement [redacted] [redacted] (3) [redacted] insisted that the SCABS who tried to BREAK the strike get [redacted] in BACKPAY for their service in strikebreaking!**
- The union bosses pressured the workers to agree to the sellout.

TENANTS & WORKERS SPEAK

"We'd like 2 start this letter by saying, "what's going on." Do we really know? Well, WE KNOW, and would like 2 tell u: THIS WAS A PLAN for almost 6 years. We heard this from the Pastor's mouth, who is across the street from us on [redacted] We spoke with him in June. He said 2 us that he, as well as our 'community leaders'—[redacted]—and this includes the politicians with their hands in the pockets of the millionaire landlords and big wigs—knew about the PLAN. Don't u think for one second that they didn't know. TENANTS, please know THIS IS PART OF THE WAR BEING WAGED BY THE LANDLORD AGAINST US. The workers were fired. Now, the landlord is showing us, day by day, that we tenants r next. I must stress how this takeover began: the landlord went after our maintenance workers, then the fires, and we r next. The landlord is trying to get us with his scare tactics. You may owe some money for rent and u may feel that the landlord has a leg 2 stand on in starting an eviction process. DON'T BE AFRAID! It is a 'process' they have 2 go through and it takes money." —A Tenant

"I just want 2 things where I live at in my building. It's clean. And the workers get reinstated. The Tenants Association needs to come out and show support. It's really sad. I don't understand this Tenants Association at all." —A Tenant

"The union is working for themselves, not for the best interest of the workers. They don't care if we get back in the building, they just want their sign - [redacted] - back in the building. They don't care if it's John Peckerwood in the building." —A Worker

"We got sold out. The union hasn't come to us yet and explained anything. They just made the deal. The union didn't give us no respect. If it wasn't for us, the union wouldn't even be in there. To them, it was all about 'let's make a deal.' Management made the final decision. These people just got a slap on the wrist."
—A Worker

"We should have stayed together, but once you start making deals, everyone went their separate ways. And [the union delegates] [redacted] just wanted to keep his job—it was his job to keep the union in there any damn way he could." —A Worker

"Tenants see the comfort for the moment, but they don't see the hit that's coming. They don't see that they'll be out on the street like millions of homeless people." —A Worker

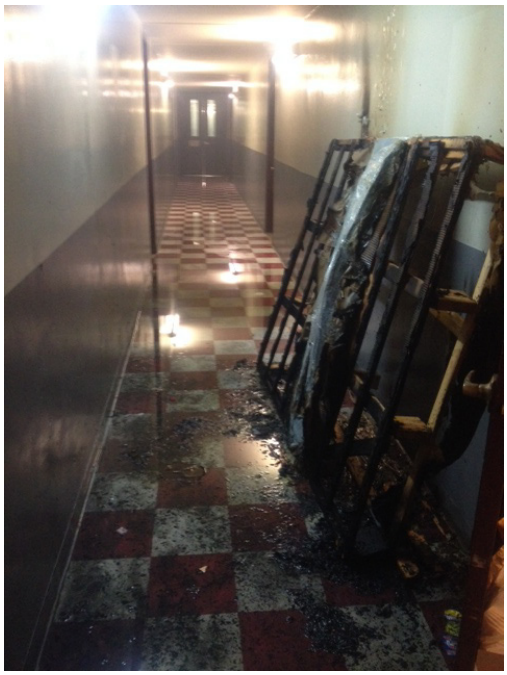
"After they made the deal with management, the union was as happy as a cat with a mouse in its mouth. They didn't bring out the fat rat to the picket because the fat rat was already there. It was the union!"
—A Worker

"The union makes a lot of decisions without us and they STILL haven't come to us. The only one who came to us was the labor board—and the are not the union! No signature! They don't have no signatures—just two. To the rest of us they just said 'fuck it' and made a deal." —A Worker

NYPD PIGS THREATEN WORKERS AND TENANTS AT [redacted] [redacted] HOUSES

On August 7, after the manager [redacted] found his tires were slashed, he sent the cops to the picket line to threaten workers and tenants. The cops ridiculously accused workers and tenants of slashing the tires and lighting the fires in the building. They blatantly took the side of management. They promised to start evicting tenants in the building. The cops did not realize that they were being **secretly recorded.** Here are some 'highlights'.

Management kept the above mattress in the basement for days after the fire happened on August 2. They tried to get rid of it after the workers' picket was over one day but members of the [redacted] [redacted] Struggle Committee saw, and took this photo before they hid it in the basement again.



The mattress on the 6th floor on August 2nd, after it caught on fire. A tenant called to notify security when they saw it in the hallway but management failed to send someone to get rid of it. Shortly afterwards the mattress caught on fire.

PIG (speaking to *Workers and [redacted] Struggle Committee members*): I'm just saying, you know with the fires the squad's already looking into it. We're just gonna let you know the squad's on top of all this stuff with the fires and stuff and now this is another report being made? The precinct, they're gonna come down here, and they're just gonna do whatever they need to do to [unclear], **you guys are making it worse...** I'm just letting you know that the precinct's really getting fed up with it, and the C.O.'s getting fed up with it, and everyone else and the [unclear] department, and they're gonna be coming down here, and **they're gonna do whatever they gotta do...** What I'm saying now, you guys are bringing more attraction to this building. [redacted] was already here in the wintertime. **Whoever has warrants in this building, whoever is a felon—has a felony past history, they're gonna start kicking people out, they're gonna start doing warrants here, you're gonna have undercovers here that you do NOT want, you gonna have [redacted] here everyday doing warrants and you don't want that...** So all I'm saying is, all I'm saying right now is that no one's pointing the finger at anybody but **you're gonna have people here from the NYPD you do NOT want.**

***

<u>NYPD PIG DEFENDS LANDLORD, CLAIMS [redacted] IS "TRYING TO FIX" THE FIRES</u>

Worker: Right, you know what the problem is? The problem is that when they took over this building the instant they doing it, THEY doing it, the OWNERS is doing it, the owners are doing it.

Pig 1: Yea but the mattresses and stuff, the fires? I'm telling you they're coming from apartments, they're not bringing mattresses up themselves.

Pig 2: Why would they wanna start their own fire? They would spend more money on the building, they already spent a lot of money on the building.

Neighborhood resident: Because they want to kick all the low-income residents out to bring rich white people in! They haven't fixed any of the fires!

Worker: The owners, man!

Pig 2: They started [fixing the fires] and people keep doing the same thing, so they are trying to fix it and they start damaging it again, you know what I mean? It's gonna take time!

Worker: You don't see the whole picture. It's a big story here, it's bigger than the strike, it's bigger than that, it's the owners doing it—

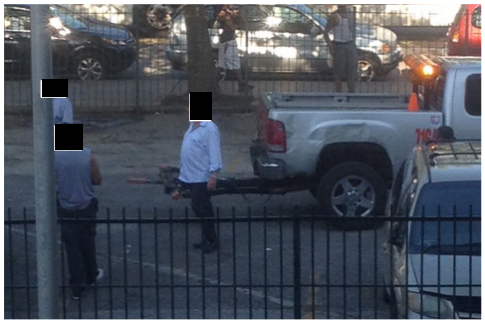
ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Calling All Freedom Fighters ... Calling All Revolutionaries ... The Moment is here upon Us ... We must stand united as one people with one common goal ... against our common enemy. We are under siege my people ... The rich capitalist, $lave makers of the poor and working class is seeking to displace us, again ... Our response to these BLOODSUCKERS—to this mass gentrification is: Hell No, We Won't Go!!! Hell No, We Won't Go!!! The rich is getting wealthy off of our oppression, tribulations, and poverty ... They are the ones capitalizing off of our suffering and struggles ... Today and everyday, we must fight against our open and known enemy. If you don't & won't then who will??? If we don't then who will?? We can't and won't rely on the same system that's been lying and cheating us ... This is our common enemy ... Calling All Freedom Fighters ... The Time Is Now!!! Let's unite with all our might ... In actions and in thought ... Together we will B victorious ... Plz, do the math ... what does all this confusion, and exploitation add up to??!!?! We are being used as $lave$, and tools to our own disadvantage ... Knowledge is power, ignorance is death ... Unity is strength, separation is a weakness ... Today, We must acknowledge the power that we have collectively as One! Today we must prepare for tomorrow ... This is our obligation ... Our duty ... Our responsibility as an oppressed people ... change of our conditions will not come from the top on down ... No my people, my comrades—change has always come from the bottom on up ... So today we RR calling all Freedom Fighters, all revolutionaries, all thinkers and doers to unite and combine forces with Us ... [redacted] ... [redacted] ... This is our community—but without communication and unity We will B displaced and pushed further away from our homes ... Pushed into another corner ... Hell No, We Won't Go!!!

FREEDOM—JUSTICE—EQUALITY
—Comrade [redacted]

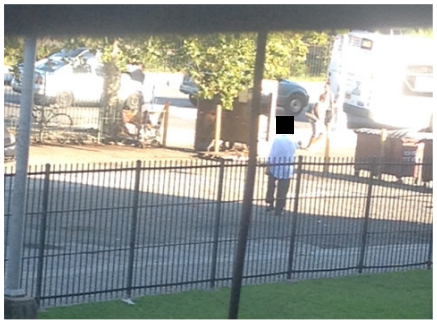
IF WE DON'T FIGHT FOR WHAT WE'RE WORTH, PEOPLE WILL ONLY GIVE US WHAT THEY THINK WE DESERVE

We need to stick together as one body and fight against future attacks, just like everyone did when management called the tow trucks into the parking lot, to tow the tenants vehicles. Everyone rose up and said "HELL NO" the parking lot gates were close n tenants guarded the gate with their bodies. They argued with management, the super and security. The police were called and the tenants still got what they wanted altogether they prevented the illegal towings. We should be allowed to use our parking lots at little to no cost! Instead of having to scramble for parking or park on another block. ..The same stand need to be made for a better living environment. We are not animals and need to REFUSE to live like them! People will only treat you and do things onto you which you allow! It's time for a change. Let's all be a part of the cultural shift taking place right here in our community. —[redacted]



Manager [redacted] shows up with the tow truck.

Tenants confront [redacted] and stop him from towing the cars.



[redacted] walks away empty-handed. No cars are towed because of the unity of the tenants.

WE NEED TO START TO ORGANIZE A RENT STRIKE

After the garbage and apartment fires, how many dangerous substances have we been exposed to? Now, we are seeing signs about **ASBESTOS**. What is being done to safeguard against exposure to this major cancer-causing substance? A residential landlord is required to make his or her building safe from asbestos. This is something we all demand! The continuing fires are directly exposing everyone to airborne disease. Do the managers and landlords, who are collecting our rents and getting rich, live in conditions surrounded by cancer- causing agents? No they don't! If it's so safe here come move your own children into the halls of smoke and asbestos. Why do we continue to pay rent to management that exposes us to cancer-causing agents? A group of tenants could force the landlord to choose between removing the asbestos or losing rent. We must organize, demand, and control our living situation! We have to start protecting ourselves from asbestos by standing together against the landlord by strengthening the [redacted] [redacted] Struggle Committee. Each floor needs a leader that wants to fight. After the rudeness and disrespect being shown toward us everyday, we must demand to live rent-free in these hazardous conditions. Who will fight for us if we don't fight for ourselves? Let's start asking serious questions and come together.

The fire on the second floor

[redacted] [redacted] HOUSES AND THE BIG PICTURE

The struggle at [redacted] is not just a tenants' struggle.

It is not just a workers' struggle.

It is a struggle for power between two forces:

The Capitalist Parasites VS. The People

WHO ARE THE CAPITALISTS?

The landlords and their crew: management, security, cops, sell-out unions, fake Tenants Associations, and politicians.

The landlord hires management and security to help them make money and stop any tenant or worker organizing. They:

- Fired the union maintenance workers and hired scabs at low wages
- Sent building security to spy on tenant and neighborhood meetings
- Refused to fix elevators or clean up after 'mysterious' fires
- Locked tenants out of common areas (the parking lot, the community room, the courtyard)

The landlord even has their own army: the NYPD pigs.

Management has the pigs on speed dial! One call and they come running.

The NYPD harass the workers and threaten to kick out tenants. We secretly recorded these threats (see page 3).

The unions are supposed to support the workers, but instead they negotiate a sell-out deal with management, and only hire back some of the workers.

The Tenants Association is supposed to support the tenants, but instead they secretly meet with management behind closed doors, leaving the tenants in the dark.

The local politicians have known about plans to turn [redacted] Houses into luxury condos for the white and wealthy for years!! They bring in Citibikes for the rich hipsters who are going to take over your apartment.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE?

The people are the tenants, the workers and people in the neighborhood that say:

"HELL NO, WE WON"T GO!"

The people are the ones who resist and fight back against the Blood$ucker$.

The enemy has money, laws and weapons, but we have masses of people who are willing to fight.

If we organize our power, if we refuse to leave, then there is nothing they can do to stop us.

We CANNOT rely on the courts, cops, lawyers, politicians or media. They are all tools of the white-supremacist capitalist class.

Red is the symbol of the working class. Let's build RED POWER in the building, so we can decide our own future, use our own community room for free, park in our own parking lot, organize our own building security, BBQ in our own courtyard, and refuse to pay higher rents.

WE WANT TO CONTROL OUR OWN LIVES, AND REFUSE TO BOW, BEND AND SCRAPE FOR CRUMBS.

Workers and Tenants United! We Won't Go!

WE WANT TO UNITE ALL WHO CAN BE UNITED

We think it is wrong that the working class does all the work, and the capitalists keep all the money.

We want to live in a world where everyone has what they need, and we all contribute according to our abilities.

We support people's power against the bloodsucking exploiters and oppressors.

We oppose the oppression of the Black nation and the working class.

We are against capitalism. In capitalism there are unemployed workers and closed factories. In capitalism, there are people without shoes and shoes that cannot be sold. In capitalism, there are empty apartments and buildings and people in shelters. In capitalism, the capitalist class grows fat off the labor of workers.

We want to change that. We want to unite all who can be united—members of [redacted] Struggle Committee include communists, Muslims and Christians—to defend [redacted] Houses from the parasitic landlords who want to turn the buildings into luxury condos for the white and wealthy.

DEFEND [redacted]
HOUSES BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY!

—[redacted] Struggle Committee

APPENDIX B:

Popular Booklet on the Housing Question Today

The Housing Struggle

A Capitalist Tragedy
How Landlords Exploit Tenants and Destroy Neighborhoods

"I wish the rent
Was heaven sent."
— Langston Hughes

This pamphlet is about the **housing question**. But in order to understand the housing question, we must first understand something about the society we live in: **capitalist society**.

Why is there a huge gap between the rich and the poor under capitalism?

We live in a **class society**. A class society is one in which a small minority lives off the labor of the majority. In capitalist society, the **capitalist class** (the class of business owners), lives off the labor of the **working class** (the class of workers). This relationship of production between capitalists and workers is a relationship of **exploitation**.

Capitalism is the name of the system of exploitation built around the relationship between the capitalist and the worker. When we go to work, we think that we are getting paid for our labor. But that's an **illusion**. We are paid a wage to cover the **cost of our own reproduction as workers**, the cost of our **daily expenses** (food, clothing, housing, entertainment). These are all the things we need to 'recharge our batteries' so that we can go show up at our jobs each day and work.

How does the boss make money? Where does PROFIT come from?

When we go to work, we might **make things** (in a factory, a restaurant, a construction site) or we might **provide a service** (in nursing, childcare, cleaning, security). The amount of stuff we make or the services we provide actually sell for more than we get paid. We are **not paid** for our **labor,** but for *our ability to labor* — that is, our labor ***power***. The price of reproducing our labor power every day is

the price of all the things we need every day to live.

This is where profit comes from. The burger the fast-food worker makes or the house the construction worker builds is sold for MORE money than they are paid to make it.

Example: at McDonalds, a worker makes hundreds of burgers in 8 hours, which sell for maybe $1,200 dollars (400 burgers x $3), but they only take home $8.50/hour, or $68 in one eight hour shift. The boss keeps the difference = $1,132!! ***The worker just made all that money for the boss, and only got to keep a small portion!***

In our example, the worker makes 50 burgers an hour, with a value of $150. That means the worker covers their total daily wage in the first 27 minutes of work. The rest of the eight-hour shift (exactly 7 hours and 33 minutes) the worker is working **free** for the capitalist.

This is how **exploitation** works under capitalism. **Profit** is the **unpaid labor of workers**.

This is why **Malcolm X** said: "You show me a **capitalist**, and I'll show you a **bloodsucker**!"

Exploitation is reinforced through white supremacy

White-supremacist capitalism divides up the labor force along lines of **race and nationality**. The mainly-white capitalist class keeps certain groups in misery with **low standards of living**, for example the Black and Puerto Rican nations. The capitalists can then **pay workers from these groups lower wages** than workers from other groups because their oppressive living conditions mean they require relatively little money to reproduce their labor power every day.

By maintaining this pool of workers in conditions of misery, the capitalists can not only pay low-wages for certain jobs, but they can also draw on a ready supply of workers willing to take those jobs.

Furthermore, capitalists and capitalist politicians (for example,

Trump) can manipulate competition for jobs between Black workers, Asian workers, white workers and Latino workers in order to disorganize the working class. This makes it much easier for the bosses to **pay low wages to all workers**, regardless of nationality.

Why does the capitalist class have all the power?

The big capitalists and landlords have many organizations through which they exercise their power: the courts, the police, the government, the schools, the army.

Politicians work for the bosses and the landlords. Why are there NO politicians who live in the projects? Why are there NO lawyers or judges who ride the bus to work? Because they get paid well to protect the bloodsucking capitalists from the working class.

Capitalists, including landlords, maintain their power through the laws their politicians pass, the courts that enforce those laws and the cops who maintain social order. These running dogs of the capitalists are as much enemies of the people as the capitalists themselves.

Housing and Tenants

The **tenant struggle is part of the class struggle**, because landlords and tenants have directly opposed interests. Landlords profit off the misery of tenants.

A landlord is a capitalist who invests in real estate, and capitalists care about only one thing: obtaining the greatest possible return on their investment—that is, they only care about PROFITABILITY. They do not care about the quality of life of tenants or whether they can afford rent.

How are housing prices determined?

The way housing prices are determined depends on the zone in which the housing is located.

There are three housing markets that correspond to three separate

zones that divide up the city: **normal**, **privileged** and **sub-normal**. Let's look at each of these housing markets.

Normal housing

The normal housing market is for **most workers** and **employees**.

For this reason, the bulk of housing in the city is in the normal housing market. The price of housing is more or less the same throughout the normal zone. Homes in the normal housing market generally have the same features (running water, heat, full kitchens, etc.) and are in locations with similar advantages.

The price of housing here is determined by the conditions of production: the cost of construction, typical profitability for the housing construction sector, and so forth. These conditions of production determine an **average price of normal housing** — the market rate for the normal housing zone.

This average price of normal housing is somewhat higher in locations with cheap transportation, and somewhat lower in locations with expensive transportation, but the prices don't vary that much otherwise within the normal zone.

Privileged housing

Housing in the privileged zone is for **wealthy professionals** and **capitalists**.

Privileged housing is more expensive than normal housing because such homes are located in rare or desirable locations (for example, next to Central Park or along the Brooklyn waterfront), and there is therefore a limited supply of housing at each location. The price of housing varies greatly within the zone according to the location.

When the housing market is expanding, real estate development capitalists will try to expand the zone of privileged housing to new areas (for example, Williamsburg a decade ago, or Bed-Stuy today) where they can buy land more cheaply than they can in already-established privileged areas, and therefore make a greater profit.

Sub-normal housing

Sub-normal (low-income) housing is for minimum-wage workers, part-time workers, semi- or unemployed workers, undocumented workers, etc.

This housing is less expensive than normal housing. **Capitalists will not spend money producing new buildings in this zone** because rentals are too low for them to make an average return on their investment. It is simply not profitable for real-estate developers to build new low-income housing.

If capitalist real-estate developers won't build new low-income housing, where does it come from?

Most of the housing in this zone is produced by **abandoning normal housing** and letting it **deteriorate**.

In addition, because there is not enough housing at this price level to meet the existing demand, **the city has to pay** for the construction of a large amount of sub-normal housing—for example, through NYCHA. The capitalist city government subsidizes such construction because its capitalist masters need to keep the pool of low-wage workers near their jobs.

Because there is a **shortage** of sub-normal housing, the **price of housing** in the sub-normal zone still **goes up**, even though the buildings in this zone are **not** being *properly maintained*! For this reason, the **shortage of housing** in this zone actually **benefits the capitalists**. We must always remember that capitalism is production for profit, not production that directly meets people's needs.

Almost all sub-normal housing consists of old buildings that are **not up to current standards** for normal housing: outdated stoves and other appliances, lead paint, no fire escapes, old radiators, leaking ceilings, rats, roaches….

The number of low-income buildings **increases** when capitalists stop putting money into repairs and maintenance of buildings in the normal housing market. The buildings then pass into the

sub-normal market.

The number of low-income buildings **decreases** when the landlord of low-income buildings decides either

> (1) to **demolish** the buildings to sell to a private developer, who produces new buildings for the normal or privileged housing markets,

or

> (2) to **renovate and improve** them, so the buildings pass into the normal or privileged housing markets (after evicting the tenants).

That's right: ***improvements and maintenance actually reinforce the shortage of low-income housing!***

TWO CHOICES FOR LANDLORDS

1. Maintenance

Buildings require constant upkeep, which means that the landlord must invest money in keeping the building in decent shape. This means investing money. If the landlord stops maintaining the building, it will eventually be **destroyed**.

But remember! A landlord is a capitalist, and capitalists care about one thing: the biggest possible return on their investment. They only care about one thing: **$$$**.

So a landlord will only maintain a building if it is **profitable**. Otherwise, he will stop maintaining it.

In order for a landlord of a building in the **normal zone** to invest in upkeep, the building

—must bring in relatively **high rents,**
—must be capable of being improved to **current standards**,
—must serve tenants with a certain amount of **wealth**,
—its location must allow it to stay in the n**ormal or privileged**

markets,
—it must be **repairable at a reasonable cost,**
—and it must be **easy to evict tenants** in order to bring in wealthier tenants as the price of housing goes up.

Only THEN can the landlord compete with other capitalists and make a decent return on his investment.

The landlord of an older building in the **sub-normal zone** may also decide to **invest in improvements.**

In this case, the landlord hopes to **evict the low-income tenants** and **move in wealthier tenants**, so that the building will then pass into the normal or privileged housing markets. (We see this in neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy, which now include a substantial number of middle- and upper-income tenants.)

2. Neglect, disinvestment

The other choice is for a landlord to make little to no investment in repairs or other maintenance. This choice transforms the landlord into a '**slumlord**.' The slumlord still collects rent but does not spend a dime on repairs, in order to keep as much profit as possible. What was normal housing now becomes sub-normal housing. Rents fall and the building is slowly destroyed.

However, neglecting the building can still make the landlord a huge profit.

Rents may go down compared to normal housing, but (1) as we said above, because of the shortage of housing, **prices will increase** (2) the policy of abandonment means that the landlord is investing virtually nothing in the building, and (3) through Section 8 and other subsidy programs, the government pays the landlord the difference between low-income rentals and the average price of housing in the normal zone.

All three of these factors **fatten the wallet** of the **bloodsucking slumlord**.

If the slumlord is fined by the city for violations, he may decide that paying the fine is cheaper than making the improvements.

Where does this policy of abandonment usually happen?

This policy of abandonment occurs in one of two geographical areas: either

> (1) in certain working-class neighborhoods where there are **no profits to be made currently or in the near future**, such as Brownsville. In this case, the landlord lets the building go indefinitely, making only the minimal repairs needed to keep the building standing.

or

> (2) in working class neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy and East New York, **at the edge of expanding privileged or normal zones**.
>
> In this case, the landlords continue to collect rent as they slowly **destroy their buildings** and then make a big **profit** when they **evict the tenants**, **demolish the building** and sell it to a **developer.** This developer then builds new housing for wealthier tenants.
>
> ***The landlord cashes in on his investment precisely at the moment the tenants are moved into the shelters and onto the streets.***

Both situations explain why a landlord might buy an old building that is already sub-normal and hold onto it for a few years, collecting rent and Section 8 while it falls apart.

<u>What about NYCHA buildings?</u>

NYCHA is not immune to the laws of capitalism, and maintaining low-income housing in liveable condition is a bad investment from the point of view of profitability, even if the landlord is the city itself.

Since NYCHA cannot afford profitably to make improvements, they have recently begun to **sell off a substantial stake in public housing to private developers**. In return for making improvements, the government pays the private capitalists the difference between the low price of subnormal housing and the price of normal housing, just as they do in private low-income buildings that accept subsidies.

This amounts to a public transfer of wealth to private capitalists. These capitalists will eventually seek to take over the buildings and either destroy them and build housing for middle- or upper-income tenants, or improve them so they pass into higher rental markets. In either case, the landlord's plan is ultimately to evict the poor tenants in order to bring in wealthier tenants.

What is to be done?

All exploited and oppressed people, under the leadership of the working class, need to organize their power.

How can the masses organize their power?

What we have described in this pamphlet is a **system** of exploitation and oppression that includes the landlords, but also the city government, the judicial system, the media and the cops. The capitalists have these institutions in their back pockets. The social role of such capitalist institutions is to make sure that conditions allow capitalists to make the maximum possible profits at our expense.

This is why **calling 311**, **going to the courts, alerting the newspapers** and **pressuring politicians** cannot **reverse this social process** that we see **all over Brooklyn**, even if it might result in a few individual victories.

As we have seen, the lifeblood of the system is capitalists getting the greatest return on their investment. Nothing will get in the way of that iron logic of profit-making except the organized power of the people.

The only way we can oppose the landlords and other capitalists is

to form **organizations of our own: struggle committees.**

Struggle committees are organizations of tenants, workers and students in our apartment buildings, neighborhoods and workplaces that **refuse to cooperate** with the institutions of the class enemy, whether it is the courts, the cops, the sell-out unions, city council, the media or local nonprofits.

How do struggle committees defend the people on the housing front?

When the landlord serves a family its eviction papers, the struggle committee stops the landlord from kicking them out by *physically organizing a defense of their home.*

When the landlord raises rents, the tenants *collectively refuse to pay higher rents.* Our wages aren't going up, so why should we be paying more money to live in the same apartments?

When the landlord steals common areas and laundry rooms, the struggle committee *organizes the building to take them back for the people.*

When the landlord refuses to repair broken windows and leaky ceilings, when the landlord turns off the heat and hot water, the tenants will *organize takeovers of the management office* until all repairs are made.

Only our own organizations can represent our own interests. It is only by organizing our power against the class enemy that we can overcome exploitation and oppression.

The **strategic plan of the slumlords** is to neglect repairs, evict tenants and abandon their buildings.

The enemy may seem to be strong, but in reality it is nothing more than a **paper tiger.**

By forming people's organizations, we can begin to formulate a **strategic plan of our own** that will allow us to take control over our own lives and confront our exploiters and oppressors.

This is the **real meaning** of the slogan: **"All Power to the People!"**

Malcolm X said: "It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck. Capitalism used to be like an eagle, but now it's more like a **vulture.** It used to be strong enough to go and **suck anybody's blood** whether they were strong or not. But now it has become more cowardly, like the vulture, and it can only suck the blood of the helpless. As the nations of the world free themselves, capitalism has less victims, less to suck, and it becomes weaker and weaker. It's only a matter of time in my opinion before it will collapse completely."

STRUGGLE COMMITTEES EVERYWHERE!

The Struggle Committees Initiative

[redacted]